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TALES FROM



BLACKWOOD



FROM

“BLACKWOOD”

New Series

VOL. VI.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON



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TALES FROM "BLACKWOOD."

WHAT I DID AT BELGRADE.

BY BOB CONSIDINE.

[MAGA. JANUARY 1868.]

I HAD made a most unfortunate book on the "Oaks." Hammersley told me, Bicknall told me, Sackville Jervas told me—they all told me—Glaucus was sure to win. They had had it from Locksley, who got it from Spooner, who knew a fellow who was constantly about with one of the stablemen. Then Argus said it in the 'Post,' and "Happy-go-Lucky" repeated it in 'Bell's Life,' and another in the 'Sport' said, "I borrowed a 'fiver' yesterday to lay it on Glaucus, and if any reader of this will kindly trust me with another, I pledge myself to send it in the same direction."

How was I then to doubt that I was on a safe thing? In fact, if I showed the slightest distrust

about it, all the fellows in the "Rag" began to chaff me about being a "downy cove" and an "artful dodger," accusing me of trying to raise the odds against my horse, and palpably insinuating that if not an out-and-out "leg," I was something not very remote from it.

I am not going over the miserable three weeks before the race, a time I now look back upon as a man might regard the delirium of a fever. I awoke every morning to go through a day of agonising alternations of hope and fear. Every man I met had something to tell me that was sure to set my heart a throbbing. "I say, Considine," would whisper one, "get all you can on it; Glaucus has it sure. Rig the Market was bled yesterday, and Highlander's leg is thicker than ever." "Back out of your horse, Bob," said another. "They don't mean him to win; he's only running for Pole Cat. It's the mare they stand on." "Ain't you on Glaucus?" cried a third. "Take a railway ticket then for Taganrog, I'd advise you, for he'll not be placed. Cut your lucky, old fellow, at once, and have your death inserted in the 'Times.'" "Glaucus will do well," muttered a stranger in my hearing, "if the course is heavy; dirty weather and deep ground will be seven pounds in his favour." Oh! didn't I watch the barometer after that? Was there in all England a farmer who prayed for rain as earnestly and eagerly as I did?

I cannot dwell on this terrible period. The eventful day came, and though the rain fell in torrents, and no man living had ever seen the "Oaks" run in such weather, a small wiry mare called Mrs Perkins won—Glaucus nowhere! nor I either! I sold out my troop in the "Roans," and with the price, and all I could scrape together, even to the sale of some Indian shawls and trumpery with which I had speculated on winning the affections of my aunt Dinah, a rich old damsel in North Wales, I paid all my debts on the turf, and found myself the next morning, as I awoke, with thirty-four pounds and some odd silver for all my fortune in the world.

I remember how I strolled down to the "Rag" to breakfast, affecting to think nothing of it—how I chaffed the fellows about their losses, and when some one asked me if I hadn't had it "hot and hot," I only laughed and said some commonplace about "better luck another time," and tossed off a liqueur-glass of brandy to keep me from fainting.

If, however, I escaped commiseration, it was only to incur something far worse; for seeing how easily I took my losses, the report immediately got about that I had made a splendid thing of it, that half the money won on Mrs Perkins was in *my* pocket, that I had been betting through agents—they actually named the men; in a word, that I was one of the slickest, deepest, craftiest fellows in existence; and I

even once overheard an encomium on my acuteness finishing off with "The Indian fellows are more wide-awake than any of us." This was too much for me. I started for the Continent the day after. I went over to Ostend, where I found scores of men who had been on the wrong side of the post, but who, unlike me, had not met their engagements. They were jolly rascals enough, who took their bad luck philosophically. They breakfasted on devilled mackerel and champagne, and bantered each other in the most jovial fashion over their respective books, and laughingly told over all the "robberies" they had meditated, but broke down in.

I found a few more of the same stamp at Brussels, and as I ascended the Rhine, I met here and there a stray levanter taking the waters at Ems, or waiting for some one. Your levanter has always a friend coming to join him; but wherever I chanced upon them, they were always well dressed and well-to-do, living at the best hotels of the place, and evidently denying themselves nothing that the locality afforded.

I own that I marvelled much and deeply over this strange mysterious fact, that men whom in their palmy days I had often seen anxious and fretful and careworn, should become, by the simple incident of being irretrievably ruined, not only the pleasantest, cheeriest, jauntiest of mankind, but, what was still stranger, to all seeming the easiest

on the score of expense, abounding in money, and living with a disregard to cost that was positively miraculous.

I wish I could tell my reader that I have sounded the depth of this mystery, and that I have read this enigma ; but I own with shame that the puzzle remains to me what it was on the first day I encountered it. I could see plainly enough there was a sort of freemasonry amongst these men ; and though so far as being ruined entitled me to being made free of the Guild, they made no advances towards admitting me, but left me out with the rest of the profane world to wonder at and admire them. Over and over again I was on the point of asking one of them to confide his secret to me, but I could not pluck up courage for the effort. Indeed, the question involved such a direct indelicacy, that I could not compass it ; for by what right or on what pretext could I ask a man how he could afford saddle-horses, a box at the opera, Steinberger and Chateau La Rose at breakfast, and a score of other indulgences not less costly nor less engaging ?

Perhaps I shall arrive at the knowledge some day, was my sole consolation. Perhaps a man only attains to it after being frequently ruined—being, so to say, acclimatised to misfortune. If so, I must only wait and have patience.

At all events I could not very long continue to frequent such costly companionship. Champagne

suppers and whist at "pound points" did not exactly chime in with the contents of my purse, and so I stole away from Wiesbaden on the morning of a picnic, my contribution to which had already nearly left me aground.

I wandered on to Schaffhausen, I scarcely can say why, except some hidden instinct had suggested to me that the falls of the Rhine might be an appropriate drop-scene to the luckless drama of my life. I was utterly purposeless, without aim or object. I only knew that when my last few francs were spent, my rambles must cease like a clock that has run down; but what was to happen to me after I could not imagine, nor, shall I own, did the thought press heavily on me. The world evidently had no want of me. I occupied no place in its business, its interest, or its pleasures. I felt as might a guest in a room where he knew no one, and who might slip away without even a word of farewell to his host.

After all, thought I, when I do drop out of the ranks, I have the satisfaction of knowing my name will not be remembered at roll-call. None will regret, none miss me. It was in some such frame of mind as this I sat at the large bow-window of the Weissen Ross, now looking out on the falls that were thundering away close beneath me, now trying to amuse myself with a 'Galignani' of three weeks old, not a little crumpled and mustard-stained.

The white and foamy sheet of water, spanned by a rainbow above, and lost in a cloud of foam below, had partly addled, partly soothed me. I had gazed so long at its seething flood, that I did not well know whether the water was going down or up. The roar had ceased to stun me, and was now murmuring a soft sleepy sort of croning song, suggesting evening rambles in a forest glade, or a soft moonlight row on a Highland tarn silent and still.

Though the busy waiters bustled about in preparation for the *table d'hôte* supper, and rattled knives and jingled glasses with all their wonted ability, I minded them not; nor was I aroused from my musings as the room filled with company, and many tongues of many languages jostled and encountered each other. These greetings and salutations swept across my senses, at times slightly disturbing me; but my dreamy stupor was too complete to be dissipated by their talk. At last they took their places at the table, and the solemn business of eating succeeded to the buzz of conversation.

“*Wollen sie nicht soupiren?*” asked the waiter, in his vile bastard German. I looked up, and was about to reply, when a young man arose from the table, and, rushing over to me, cried out, “What, Jemmy, is this really you? When did you come here?”

"My name is not Jem," said I, gravely.

"Not Jemmy—not Jemmy Considine of the Carbineers?" cried he, in amazement.

"No; I'm his brother," said I, with more courtesy, now that I saw the blunder. "We are constantly mistaken for each other, and we see the likeness ourselves."

"And are you Bob?" asked he, with a pleasant smile.

"Yes," said I, "I'm Bob."

"Haven't I heard stories about you! It was *you* who killed the two tigers the same morning at Nuttyghur. It was *you* went to the Governor's fancy ball as a she-gorilla, with a real monkey for a baby. It was you rode the nullah——"

"Stop, for mercy's sake!" said I; "they are staring at us:" and I whispered, "Half the people there are English."

"Come over and sup with me," cried he. "I'm Fred Ponsonby; your brother must have spoken of me."

"I know *you* as well as you can possibly know *me*; Jem's letters are always full of you. Have you left the Carbineers?"

"Yes; I have gone into the diplomatic service. Come along and let us eat something, and we'll have a cigar afterwards in my room, and a gossip till daybreak."

And so had we. It was bright rosy morning

ere we separated, that five hours' talk having knitted us together like friends of years' standing, and we were Fred and Bob from that hour forth.

I had no need to tell him of my misfortunes, he knew them all already: such things are soon bruited "about town."

He had tried to find me out in London, but in vain. At the clubs they had told him that though I was "hard hit," it was clear enough I didn't mind it; for three days after the "Oaks" I had given a splendid dinner at the "Trafalgar," some little incidents of which bespoke its costly character; and then he heard I had left town.

"And what do you mean to do now?" asked he curtly.

"If I don't throw myself down there," said I, "I really don't know;" and I threw my cigar end into the falls at my feet.

"Not a bit of it," said he, slapping me on the shoulders; "a fellow like you is not so easily beat. One cropper never spoiled a man's hunting."

"Except he broke his neck."

"That's not your case, Bob. You'll come all right yet; but we must have time to think it over—so, first of all, come along with me to Belgrade. I have got despatches for the Servian Government, and I am to wait there probably a month or two, till something is arranged. It's a dull place, but

we'll make the best of it; and you are my guest, remember, till you find something you like better."

He opposed all my objections, and conquered all my scruples so effectually that I gave in at last, and found myself on the road to Vienna—where we were to halt a day for instructions—almost ere I knew it.

"It's all right," said Fred, as he came in to dinner at the Archduke Carl Hotel at Vienna. "I'm to remain three months at Belgrade, master the Servian question, whatever that is, and come back strong in Montenegro and the Lower Danube."

"And do you know anything about these?"

"About as much as a cat does of cuneiform! But what does that signify? I'll get up my Servia, you'll see; and if I blunder, I have the supreme felicity of feeling that none can detect me. Diplomacy, my dear Bob, is like one of those drawing-room dramas, where every man speaks his part out of his own head, and when the rejoinders come right it is a happy accident. When you read my blue-book on Servia you'll be positively amazed where I got my learning."

Our journey was so interesting, and Fred's company so agreeable, that I almost forgot my misfortunes; and it was only at times, and possibly by a process of reasoning, that I arrived at the fact that I was ruined and left without a shilling

in the world. As it was a theme Fred would not suffer me to talk on, I was driven to keep it for my lonely hours ; and, sooth to say, they were of the fewest, for after our long rambling, talking, and laughter we generally dropped off asleep, and woke only to renew intercourse in the same strain.

When we reached Belgrade we found a splendid suite of rooms prepared for us at the chief hotel. Fred had telegraphed, in fact, for everything ; and horses and carriages and servants and *carasses* had been all duly hired, and ready for our arrival. The first few days were occupied by Fred in his official visits — dreary performances, if I might judge from the exhausted, worn-out look he brought back from them, and the few tiresome details which were all he could give of his meetings with these people.

“I’m to be precious cautious,” he said to me one day. “My instructions are to have no intimacies, and above all to beware of the Russians, who have spies everywhere. *You*, however,” added he, “who have nothing at stake, you may know any one ; therefore go about and dine at the various *tables d’hôte* and *cafés*, and learn all that you can of the place and its belongings, and whatever you can pick up, historical, political, social, or nonsensical, will do for my blue-book.”

I was glad to fancy I could be of any use to my friend, and at once proceeded to carry out his

instructions. My accomplishments as a linguist had won me immortal fame in my regiment, but I grieve to own they did not sustain the coarse test of actual use. I had little French, less German, and no Italian; but by dint of frequenting *cafés* and public places, I at last acquired a sort of jargon, in which all the three tongues mingled, and which my interlocutors were pleased to recognise as a sort of *lingua franca*, wherein they accepted me as intelligible, and vouchsafed to answer my questions. In the course of my peregrinations I had made acquaintance with an old man, whose few words of English had introduced him to me, but with whom, if one were to pronounce from his dress, manner, or appearance, certainly there were not many inducements to intimacy. He was tall, and slightly stooped, with a very narrow head and face, a villanous squint, and a long white beard, which descended to his breast like a waterfall. He had been, as he told me, for upwards of forty years *dolmetscher* or interpreter to the Austrian Embassy at Constantinople, and was now on a retired pension. Rumour added that he eked out his financial deficiencies by acting as a Russian spy.

From him I learned that there was a species of *pensionnat*, kept by an old Albanian lady, where all that Belgrade contained of wit, brilliancy, and ability, was accustomed to dine every day; that he

had himself frequented it for years, and only ceased to do so from the expense—the dinner and wine, with coffee, cigars, and *chasse*, amounting to very close on two francs per diem. After a very brilliant description of the company, consisting, as it struck me, of spies from every nation of Europe, he proceeded to tell me that old Madame Narratohie was now nearly ninety years of age, and perfectly deaf; the establishment being managed by a young girl, her grand-daughter, who was also grandniece to the famous Mameluke who figured on the staff of the First Napoleon; that mademoiselle was the beauty, *par excellence*, of Belgrade; that she had refused the most brilliant offers of marriage, and had even declined the great honour of being part of the Sultan's own harem at Pera.

Having excited my curiosity to a high degree, my old friend concluded by an offer to present me the following day, with the simple condition of being my guest on the occasion. I readily acceded to this arrangement; and having told Fred of my project, and received from him the usual caution as to reserve and guardedness in all my intercourse with the company, I set out for the rendezvous.

It was some distance off in the suburb that the house stood. The approach lay through a thickly planted vineyard, dotted here and there with olive and mulberry trees, from which we came out on a species of lawn, beautifully green and level, where

there rose an enormous building, broken by towers and minarets and bastions in a way that left one uncertain whether it was a church or a fortress. It had been an ancient Greek convent at one time, purchased by the Servian Government for a barrack, and latterly disused. It was now let out in tenements — Madame Narratochie having secured the central portion, being that which contained the finest rooms and the chapel, whose walls boasted frescoes by a famed artist of Padua.

I was still in admiration of the spacious hall, lighted by two rows of windows, and roofed by an arched ceiling, a miracle of stucco-work, when a loud bell summoned us to dinner.

Though the table was laid for above forty guests, it only occupied a most ignoble portion of the ample chamber, the ancient refectory of the convent. We took the places assigned to us, and sat down amongst the very motliest company it was ever my fortune to forgather with. They were all men and mostly middle-aged or old, two or three only being under thirty. There was scarcely a nationality or a costume of Turkey, Greece, the Danubian Provinces, Hungary, or Croatia, without a representative there. Some were fine, actually noble looking fellows, splendid in their glittering dresses and picturesque weapons, and bearing themselves in all the conscious pride of their gallant appearance; others, not less picturesque in their

shabby finery, were as mangy and disreputable as need be. Beside an Albanian with scarlet vest all braided with gold, and a belt studded with embossed pistols, would be a fellow in a dirty yellow jacket, lined with sheepskin, his legs cased in leather gaiters, laced with a scarlet thong, and fastened above with a tag and tassel that might have sustained a curtain.

Fierce-eyed, wild-looking Hungarians, in dolman and attila, confronted grave-featured, dreamy-visaged Turks with soiled turbans and dirty white stockings.

It was a company in which one instinctively felt that any difference of opinion would have met a very speedy settlement, and by other methods than those taught in the schools. Perhaps some consciousness of this fact pervaded the company generally, for there was little conversation, and that little in a low tone, and only between those who sat side by side. When I asked my introducer—who, by the way, neither presented me to any one, nor explained how or why I was there—where were all those witty sallies and pleasant stories he had promised me, he cautiously whispered me to wait patiently, and above all, to let no one overhear me passing any opinion on the company. We were some time at table—it was nigh the middle of the dinner—when a short, thick-set, mean-looking man, of about fifty, dressed in a green attila with

silver frogs, and wearing a tall cap of Astracan, entered the room. He walked straight up to the top of the table, where a vacant chair stood, but instead of seating himself in it, he made a low and reverential bow to the empty place, and deposited on the folded napkin in front of it a bouquet of moss-roses, which ceremony over, he retired to a place near the foot of the table.

"Who is he?" whispered I.

"Prince John of Bulgaria; John Schiska," murmured my friend.

"And that ceremony, what does that mean?"

"Every guest in turn brings a bouquet to made-moiselle," said he, in the same cautious tone, "and she comes in at the coffee to salute the company, and receive their homage."

I give the old man's words here as he spoke them, but I cannot convey the almost tremulous deference of the tone he spoke in.

Poor old fellow! there was a film over his eyes as he told me how, rather than omit the customary tribute, or perform it ignobly, he had sold his meer-schaum, and devoted the price to the purchase of a bouquet of pink camellias that came from Jassy. "She took one out, and gave it to me," said he, "as a keepsake, and I have it still. It is dead, to be sure, but she had touched it once, and it blooms to me for ever."

He was an ugly old fellow, with a treacherous

look, and a harsh voice, but, for the moment, I vow I thought him handsome and sweet-toned, and was actually shocked at the injustice I had done him hitherto.

While the dinner proceeded, I constantly kept my eye on the chair at the head of the table, but, to my intense disappointment, it remained unoccupied to the end. There was little spoken during the meal, the company devoting themselves to the solemn duties of the occasion with a quiet earnestness that showed what importance they attached to it. Scarcely was the dinner over than the guests arose, the table was removed, and a number of smaller ones were scattered throughout the room, at which coffee and *liqueurs* were served, the company breaking up into little coteries, as acquaintance and intimacy invited.

"We may join any knot we please—it is the rule of the place," whispered my friend; "let us sit down here." And accordingly we took our places at a little table, where the Prince Schiska sat with two others in Hungarian costume. The old man presented me, using some language new and strange to me, and the others rose politely and said something, which, from its tone, I judged to be a courteous welcome.

"They are asking me," said my friend, after a moment, "whether you speak Hungarian or Slavac or modern Greek or Romaine."

"Unfortunately not," said I; "I suppose they know French?"

"French or France are not in favour here," replied he; "do your best in German—it will be safer."

I accordingly mustered enough of the "mysterious gutturals" to say something civil and complimentary about the place, the dinner, and the company, which the Prince acknowledged politely, saying, "I believe you are the first Englishman who has ever set foot here. Your countrymen, I fancy, are too haughty to like to mix with indiscriminate company; and though the rule be a safe one, they lose something by their reserve. The people who sit about you now in this room comprise every class and condition of life. That large man with the cicatrix on his cheek is Prince Carl Dolgouroki; and the man opposite to him, in green velvet and gold, was his valet once. He is now the Greek Minister of Police. Yonder is a Mexican general, who is now in command of a troop of banditti in Patras; they are in Russian pay, and are meant for service in Thessaly. He with the spectacles is the correspondent of the '*Allgemeine Zeitung*;' and the tall quaint fellow on his left is Hunyadi, who is under sentence of death in Austria; and the dark handsome man, next but one to him, is Seristarchi, a man ruined by high play, and compromised in that affair of Orsini's."

"Who is that noble-looking fellow near the

stove—he with the white attila over the scarlet jacket?”

“That’s the headsman of the Valattica of Montenegro. It’s a bold thing for him to sit down in a company many of whose sons and brothers have fallen under his sword. He’s the vainest dog in Europe, and fancies the Queen of Greece is in love with him.”

“And what do they all do here? What’s their object in meeting thus?”

“What the Bourse is to the monied folk, this room is to the secret police of Eastern Europe, and those countries which depend for their existence on the Turkish empire. They play at espionage as men gamble at Homburg; each knows what his neighbour is after, and does his best to outwit him, now by bribing higher, now by sheer knavery, now by something a little more energetic than either,” and he drew his finger significantly across his throat, and smiled as he spoke.

“The only real dupes are the newspaper correspondents. All conspire to cram them with lies, and half the rogueries of statecraft are done under the dust raised by these people’s mistakes.”

“Are you quite sure,” said I, laughing, “that I am not one of the fraternity?”

“Perfectly sure,” rejoined he, boldly. “I may tell you so in flattery, because you don’t look like them; and I may say, in candour, that with such a

limited knowledge of languages as yours, you could never hope to glean enough for correspondence."

Seeing that I took his remark in good part, for it really amused me, and made me laugh, he went on, "I know, besides, your English theory, that there is no secret in politics worth paying for. You are so constantly duped by your secret agents that you disparage the whole system; and so you go on blundering away, while your despatches are being opened at Vienna and copied at St Petersburg, wondering how it is that you are always overreached, and continually venting sharp reproofs on your ministers and envoys for not being more fully informed, while you refuse to give them the only means of information. But here comes something more interesting than State rogueries;" and as he spoke, he arose and made a few steps forward to meet a young lady who had just entered the room, and who advanced with all the dignity of a queen. She was apparently about twenty years of age, slightly, very slightly, over the middle height, but seeming taller by her costume, which was that blending of the Servian with the Ottoman that persons of rank are fond of affecting in these countries; for while she wore the scarlet jacket of Greek fashion, on her head she wore the picturesque cap of Servia, of white cloth, diminishing in size to the top, where it finished by a deep lappet of scarlet, that fell with a heavy fringe of

gold upon her shoulders. She was a blonde, but of that rich creamy tint one sees in Giorgione's pictures, with fair brown hair, and eyes not blue but grey, shaded by the longest lashes. Her mouth was, however, her chief beauty; had the lips been a little fuller, it would have been faultless. Nor am I quite certain if the girlish beauty was not more perfectly typified by the more finely traced and less plump lip.

As she moved along, slightly bending in recognition of the profound salutations that greeted her, I thought I had never seen such graceful action united with winning loveliness. The Prince stepped forward to present his bouquet, and at the same time made a gesture towards me. She gave a sweet smile, and said, in French, "An Englishman is very welcome here; I have a great love for his nation."

Whether I said anything in return, or what it was, I cannot recall. My faculties were completely upset; and as she passed on, I stood staring after her till the crowd shut her out from my sight,—and so bewildered and confused was I, that when my old companion asked me if she were not beautiful, I answered something so inappropriate as to make him laugh.

"That's what folk call love at first sight, isn't it?" said Fred Ponsonby to me, when I reported my day's experiences; "but look out, old fellow,

it's just the sort of place a man might get a stiletto into his diaphragm for a mere glance of what you or I would call honest admiration. Be satisfied with what you have seen, and don't go back there. Promise me this, seriously."

As I only shook my head in silence, he went on to press me with his reasons for the advice he had given me, finishing with—"You are perhaps not aware that you have been passing the evening with the most accomplished scoundrels in all Europe. I have been asking the landlord here about this place and the people who frequent it, and he tells me that most of the company have been at the galleys, and that there is not one of them ought not to be there now. He mentioned two or three, whose names were new to me, who had been convicted of murder; and, in fact, a more disreputable society could not be imagined, nor one wherein an honest man would less like to find himself."

"And of the old lady herself—Madame Narratohic—did he speak of her?"

"Yes; she was the widow of an old professor of Prague, a great Oriental scholar, who came here to consult some curious manuscripts in the Armenian convent. Her only daughter married a Suliote chief, who had taken service with Russia against the Turks, and was beheaded at Sulina, Anno Domini—I forget what. The widow died of grief, and the old professor soon after following her,

Madame N. herself, gathering together the friends of her late husband and those of her son-in-law, a rather incongruous lot, set up a boarding-house for *litterati* and cut-throats. Now, confess I have got my story off very creditably, considering that a good deal of it was imparted to me in a mixture of Slavac and Plat Deutsch; but in my anxiety to be of service to you I lent an uncommon amount of attention."

"So that," said I, interrupting, "there is nothing whatever against the old lady or her granddaughter?"

"Nothing beyond the fact that they keep a 'thieves'-home'—isn't that enough for you?"

"Well, now, shall I tell you what I have myself seen there? Will you accept my testimony against this man's hearsay?"

"No, Bob, I will not," said he, resolutely. "If you had not seen the beautiful Albanian I'd let you go into the witness-box at once, but now I regard your evidence as palpably one-sided." For the first time since I had known Ponsonby did I feel vexed or provoked with him. He was not only so manifestly unjust and unfair towards people he had never seen, but it was so offensive to me to find that he preferred this vulgar landlord's story to the evidences of my own experience, that I sulked and said nothing. He tried and tried to get me back to good-humour again; he reasoned, he argued, he bantered, he implored, he endeavoured to find out

some clue to my heart or to my understanding that might convince me, and at last, failing in every way, he said, "Come, Bob, I'll not worry you any more—let us talk of something else. Have you heard anything more about that philanthropic old aunt of yours? Is she really going to found an hospital for incurable Welshmen at Plmmthllymo?"

"So says the 'Morning Post,'" rejoined I, curtly.

"What's her estate worth?"

"I've heard it called close on three thousand a-year; but she has got a tin-mine besides."

"And has she no nephews nor nieces to provide for, that she must needs go abroad for her charities?"

"Scores of us; but we have all displeased her in one way or other. Some of us wouldn't go into the Church, and some of us would go into the Insolvent Court; some married, and some remained single; some were extravagant, and some were misers,—none of us hit it off right. And I, who used to be her favourite, who all said was sure to be her heir, I refused to marry a Welsh parson's daughter—a little dumpy damsel, who rode man fashion and smelt of mushroom catsup. Aunt Dinah turned me off with a fifty-pound note, and told me never to see her again."

"Had she, then, taken such a violent affection for this girl?"

"No, it wasn't that; she's a strange old lady is

aunt Dinah. She was crossed in love herself when young. She wanted to marry a poor subaltern in a marching regiment; her friends forbade it, and she lived to see this man a General, a K.C.B., and what was somewhat harder to bear, the husband of a very beautiful woman of high family. This soured her and softened her at the same time, and her whole life has been passed between paroxysms of revenge and romance—now doing things old money-lenders would be ashamed of, now yielding to impulses of sentiment worthy of an exalted young girl in her teens. It's the most complete lottery in the world how she will accept any incident that befalls one of us—so that my brother Jem, in a fit of impatience, once asked her, 'Would she like him better if he was to commit a capital felony?' "

"I wonder you never turned such a temperament to account."

"How could I—how could any one? Who was to foresee in what spirit she would receive any tidings? She was as likely to send you a cheque for five hundred as to scratch you out of her will for the self-same action."

"I'd have taken my chance, at all events. Where the ticket costs nothing, I'd have been always in the lottery."

"Anything like importunity would have been certain ruin. In fact, our best policy was to write

seldom ; and Jem never sent her any news of himself except by paragraphs out of a newspaper."

"And you—when did you last write to her?"

"I wrote to her after my grand smash. I was on my way down to see her—by invitation too, a rather rare thing, for on my arrival from India I had simply reported myself, and she replied in these terms:—

"‘DEAR NEPHEW,—If a little mountain air and Welsh ale might be deemed a good alterative after Indian heat and curry powder, come down and spend a month with your affectionate

AUNT DINAH.’

"There's the whole epistle : and when I read it I valued it at about thirty thousand pounds laid out in land."

"You thought you were about to be made her heir?"

"I was certain of it. Not one of us had ever been asked to Crwnwbiollich Castle."

"What a name!"

"I could soon give it a pronounceable title : I wish that was the only obstacle, Fred."

"Well, you said you wrote again."

"Yes, after my disaster in the 'Oaks' I wrote a few lines to say that I had come to grief ; that when I had sold out of the service, and converted

into cash a few bonds I held in the Agra, I should still be deficient a couple of hundred pounds, and consequently in no mood to inflict her with my company: she simply sent me for answer a cheque for three hundred on Coutts, and the words—"Your excuse is more than sufficient. Your much-grieved aunt, Dinah Pritchard.'"

"I declare I like that old damsel!" cried Fred; "there is a deal of character about her."

"I like her too, and if she wasn't rich I'd be off to see her to-morrow, and ask her to counsel me and comfort me; for, her oddities apart, she's a mine of good sense and good feeling, and has a mood of genuine forgiveness for faults she could not possibly have ever committed herself, which is one of the very rarest things in the whole world."

"I like her," said Fred again, and with that amount of determination in his tone that said how much in earnest he was. He arose after this and walked the room from end to end without speaking; an unlit cigar was held fast between his lips, and he seemed unaware that he was not smoking. "So that," said he at length, as if following out his own train of thought—"so that, if she should found this hospital, you'll not be left one shilling?"

"Of course not."

"By Jove," cried he, "when the old lady was thinking of incurables she might have had the grace to remember her own nephews and nieces, eh?"

"I think so too," said I, half smiling at his jest.

"Now, Bob," said he, stopping his walk, and standing directly in front of me, "I have a proposition to make you; and mind me, if you agree to what I advise, you must give me your word of honour not to retract afterwards, nor, what I should feel even worse, not be angry with me if I fail in my attempt to serve you. Do you consent?"

"Don't you think I might fairly ask in what way it is that you intend to help me?"

"I'm not sure of that," said he, doubtingly. "I want a *carte blanche* from you; and without you feel you can give me full powers, I don't think I could accept the mission."

"That's being over-diplomatic, I think," said I, half stiffly.

"No," rejoined he, "it is simply being practical; but as I see you will only trust me by instalments, I will consent to impart the first step of my plan—here it is: I shall ask for leave—three weeks' leave to transact an urgent matter of family interest. I'll ask by telegraph, and I know they'll not refuse me. When I receive my answer, I'll start for England, and hasten down to Wales and see your aunt. What I shall say to her, what statement I shall make, how I shall reply to what she herself may object,—how, in one word, I shall conduct my whole negotiation, are the matters on which I ask

your confidence, and on which I claim now not to be questioned in any way. You either trust me or you do not, which is it?"

"Trust you and thank you both—thank you as the best fellow and the heartiest I ever met with," said I, grasping his hand in both mine, and pressing it warmly.

"Enough said," cried he; "let us now talk of something else. Tell me something more about those ragamuffins you met at dinner—I want to hear more about them."

After this we rambled on in talk for hours, and only said Good-night when the faint dawn streamed through the curtains, and blended with the yellow lamplight. I scarcely felt I had been more than fallen asleep, when Fred stood at my bedside, dressed and muffled for a journey. "Here's a most provoking thing, Bob," said he; "they require me, in all haste, at Constantinople; one of my late despatches has miscarried, and they want a personal explanation from me of a circumstance I have adverted to. The telegram says, 'Start on receipt of this;' and while waiting for the horses, I have written this letter to your aunt. Of course it is a poor substitute for what I might have done had I seen her and spoken with her. It remains with you now to decide if you extend the same confidence to me in my epistolary character as in my personal. Here's the letter, sealed and ready.

Take time to think of it, and throw it into the post-office or into the fire, as you deem best."

"Post it, by all means. I trust you to the fullest extent. When shall we meet again?"

"Within a fortnight, or three weeks at latest. I must be back here by that time. I have told the landlord to supply you with all you want, and money when you need it. There, no nonsense—we'll have a grand reckoning one of these days. Take care of yourself, be cautious with the Russians, and avoid the convent. Here come the horses: bye-bye"—and he was gone.

So sudden was it all, and so dead sleepy was I, that when I awoke about mid-day I could not clearly determine whether the whole had not been a dream.

Fred Ponsonby's courier, a most accomplished rascal, whom he had left behind "to take care of me," as he called it, assured me that his master had not been in bed more than half an hour, but had been employed writing till the post-horses came to the door.

I had so very little faith in the success of any appeal from a stranger to my aunt, that I scarcely troubled my head guessing what might have been the line Fred adopted in pleading my cause. In honest truth, there was not much to be said for me; nor is there ever for those who try to make a "spoon" with only one "horn" to experiment

upon. If aunt Dinah reply at all—and I think the point doubtful—she will most probably limit herself to a polite acknowledgment of the receipt of his letter, and express a civil amount of gratitude for the attention; for she was one who knew how to measure her passages and mete out her words very skilfully. Master Fred will find that her diplomacy will be a match for his own, thought I; and with this reflection I dismissed the theme from my mind, and rarely, very rarely, recurred to it after.

And now I come to a period which, if I feel reluctant to chronicle, I must ask my reader's indulgence, to wait till the time shall have come for me to explain the motives of my reserve, and when he, or more properly *she*, will probably concur in my reasons for guardedness.

Fred was absent three weeks and four days. These three weeks and four days have made the turning-point of my whole life. In one sense, too, they were the happiest. If I awoke each morning with a full conviction of my ruined condition—if I knew and felt that I was penniless, without a career, almost without a hope—my cold stage of despondency passed off almost ere I had finished my breakfast, and to it succeeded the hot fever of a delighted heart, as I hurried away to the convent, not to leave it again till late into the night.

"You are all wrong," I wrote to Fred, whoso

courier, Maitre François, had duly informed him of my doings. "I am working harder than ever I worked before. I give two hours to modern Greek and Italian. Music was an accomplishment totally neglected in my education, and I have often bewailed my ignorance, consequently I devote an hour daily to the piano; a little rest—we garden occasionally—from three to four, and then, naturally, I must make some return for all this schooling of me. I give Katinka an English lesson till dinner-time. After dinner I try, as you used to call it, to air my vocabulary, and blunder away in Slavac and Romaic and Greek with the people here, till it is time to stroll out for a little *fresco* ramble with Katinka. I ought to tell you that old Madame Narratochie knew my grandfather, Sir Peregrine Considine, and looks upon me as an old friend—tells me about her money matters, and has imparted to me the names of her husband's relatives in Germany, who are to be written to about Katinka when she dies, and she has given me special directions about her funeral. The dear old soul cannot hear a word I say, and must be sorely puzzled by my manuscripts, which are purely phonetic. I hear I have given her the first laugh she has had for eighteen years.

"I see you shaking your wise diplomatic head over all this, and muttering, as intelligibly as your cigar will permit, a mournful prediction about how

it is all to end. I almost fancy I can hear you say, with that impatient toss of your chin—so like a horse with a tight-bearing rein—‘The fellow is getting into a precious scrape, from which there will be no exit except by disgrace or ruin;’ and I reply, Wrong on all the issues; wrong everywhere. There is no Love in the case on either side; each of us is well aware that we are both penniless, and Katinka herself made it the first condition of our intimacy, that anything bordering on courtship should be strictly excluded. ‘If I catch you spoony’ (she did not say spoony—she called it by a Greek word) ‘I’ll see you no more.’

“‘That’s all very fine,’ you say, ‘but——’

“But what? Are two people, fully conscious that Fate has separated them far as the poles asunder, and who have the courage and the candour to make this fact the condition of their friendship—are they to be such perjurers to their own hearts as to nourish hopes they have sworn to exclude? and are they, out of a cowardly mistrust of their self-control, to deny themselves the exquisite bliss of daily intercourse? hours of such ecstacy that I dare not dwell on them, lest you should misinterpret the rapture with which I recall them?”

It was in perfect honesty and in all truthfulness that I wrote this. I believed every word of it. If I did not confess that I was over head and ears in love with Katinka—that, waking or sleeping, her

image never left me—it was because I did not dare to own it to myself. The terrible forfeit I should have had to pay had I once, even once, lapsed in our contract, and ventured to talk to her of love, impressed me so powerfully, that I resolved my secret should never quit my heart.

Often and often—indeed, scarcely did a day pass without it—we talked to each other over what fate might mark our future. She knew her grandmother's project as regarded herself, and that she was to be consigned to the care of her grandfather's relations in Germany; but I could plainly see it was a plan she little liked, though she never openly declared she would resist it. She would dwell on the stiff formality of German manners, the dull routine of German life, and the horror which any trait of character excited which was not strictly in accordance with German notions. "Imagine," she would say, "my semi-savage habits introduced into one of these quiet households! fancy their shocked feelings if they asked me about some domestic care, and found that I was in utter ignorance of it—that my only education lay in talking some half-a-dozen barbarous languages, every idiom of which recalled a life of wild carelessness; and that, though I could break a colt for the saddle, or shoot a wood-pigeon with a ball, I could scarcely thread a needle, or use it when threaded."

If I remonstrated with her, and said she was un-

just to herself—that the very traits of her nature were such as were sure to find sympathy with a people so ready to dash the common work-a-day habits of life with a certain poetry—she would merely reply, “It would be very rash to try.”

What project she had conceived in her own mind—and I am sure she had one—I never knew. She would burst out at moments with a wild *furor* about the destiny of women in the East, and declare it was in gross ignorance that men wrote of them as slaves; that in reality where their intellect fitted them for companionship, they were trusted and confided in. She had actually known of occasions where the counsels that swayed a Cabinet came from the harem; and though she would not in the remotest degree connect these opinions with anything in her own destiny, they were the kind of speculations she loved to revel in—not the less, perhaps, from the amusement she derived from the misery with which I listened to them. As for myself, she predicted that if I could only conquer my indolence, and address myself resolutely to some career, I should have a certain success. “I am one,” said she to me, “who believes in luck, and I’d say you are lucky.”

“I’m afraid,” said I laughing, “that my experiences cannot exactly corroborate you.”

“Possibly enough as regards the past, but I am looking to the future.”

"Some men go in search of Fortune, and she plays hide-and-seek with them; and some, Fortune finds out for herself and adopts them for her own. I sometimes think that in a small way you are one of these."

I will not pause to own how she tortured me by the tone with which she would discuss our roads in life, always showing me how divergent they must be; and laughingly suggesting how the memory of our strange intimacy might possibly come up in after years, and how each of us would wonder what had become of the other.

I cannot dwell on the alternation of Hope and Fear in which I lived, nor say how by a word or a look she would make me the happiest or the most wretched of mankind—how no day passed without my having to experience the extreme of each state of joy or depression!

While I thus lived a life balancing between ecstasy and despair, the post brought two letters in my aunt's handwriting: one was for Ponsonby, the other for myself. Mine was very brief, but could scarcely have been more astounding. It ran thus:—

"DEAR NEPHEW,—Your friend Mr Ponsonby has told me, with all becoming delicacy and regard for my feelings, of your rash marriage, and the misery in which your thoughtless conduct has involved a

most interesting and attractive girl. I will not distress myself or you by any bitter regrets, nor add to what I feel sure must be the severe self-reproach in which your days are now passed.

"I have fortunately not confirmed the act which would alienate the whole of my estate, and I can even yet do something for one who has not hitherto done much to conciliate my esteem or respect my anxieties. I enclose you herewith a bank post-bill for two hundred pounds, and beg you and your wife to come and stay some time with me; it shall be long or short at your pleasure, though I am not without hope that my niece will induce you to bear patiently the dulness of a lonely country-house and the not always cheery company of your aunt,

"DINAH PRITCHARD."

If my first feeling was simply horror at the daring fraud which Ponsonby had practised on my aunt's susceptible nature, and the outrageous effrontery with which he had involved me in his falsehood, my second thoughts strayed away to speculating on the bliss I should have felt had the story been a true one, and had I indeed possessed the unspeakable happiness of calling Katinka my own. So much more powerful was my imagination than my sense of shame—so much stronger my love than my reason—that I almost forgot the deception in the delight the vision of bliss evoked.

The mere idea that, if it were true, what a life would be mine, sufficed to obliterate all memory of the unworthy artifice which had worked upon my dear old aunt's feelings, and brought her back to the young days when she had "lived and loved." From this delightful dream I was aroused, however, by the sight of that piece of crisp bank paper which lay before me, and where the words, "Pay to Robert Considine, Esq., or to his order, the sum of two hundred pounds," gave a distinct character of fraud to the transaction from which there was no escape.

To touch that money was clearly impossible, and to return it with the reason which forced me to restore it was at once to dishonour Ponsonby, and to recall the trust which I had pledged myself to repose in him. My rashness in the unqualified way I had placed myself in his hands did not diminish—on the contrary, it greatly increased—my anger against myself. Of course, however, there was but one thing to do, cost what it might. Rupture, quarrel, or anything else with Ponsonby, I must write to my aunt, send back her cheque, and tell her, as well as I might, that the whole was a jest, —in the worst possible taste, it was true, but, which would be infinitely blacker if carried out to an actual fraud.

I sat down to compose my letter in no pleasant humour. It was to sever the last tie that bound

me to the kind old woman who had rescued me so often from my difficulties ; and it was, as I felt, to prepare to stand alone in the world.

I began—

“ MY DEAREST AUNT,—As it is now certain I shall never dare to address you again after this letter, as it is the last opportunity I shall ever have of acknowledging the deep debt of affection I owe you, and of assuring you that of all the benefits you have bestowed upon me, none have ever had for me the same value as the love——”

As I got so far the clatter of post-horses entering the *porte cochère*, and the thundering noise of a carriage passing in, startled me. Almost in the same instant my door was thrown open, and Fred Ponsonby bounded into the room, and came towards me with all the cordial warmth of his genial manner. I cannot tell—I really know nothing of how either my looks or my gestures responded to his greeting ; I can only remember that he stopped short and cried out—

“ What’s the matter, man ? What do you mean by that sublime air of austerity ? ”

“ Do me the favour to read that,” said I, pointing to my aunt’s letter, which lay open on the table.

He snatched it eagerly, and ran it over for an instant. “ The kindest, dearest, best old damsel

in Christendom. I only wish I had half-a-dozen aunts of the same calibre, and you'd not see me cantering over the Continent with a white leather bag under my arm."

"That's all very well," said I, testily; "but it's no excuse for such a letter as you wrote to her—a deceit she never will, never ought to, forgive."

"Blow off the steam, old fellow, and just tell me when the boiler's getting cool," said he, divesting himself of his fur pelisse and his heavy travelling muffles.

"I'm not angry without cause," said I, slightly moderating my tone.

"Bring some breakfast," cried Fred to the waiter whom he had summoned to the room; "a grilled chicken, a bit of fish, an omelette—anything else you like—and good coffee for one, mind. Mr Considine will take a pomegranate ice."

"Chaff is well enough when one has nothing serious on his mind," began I, as the waiter moved away.

"Chaff! What do you call chaff? I have simply prescribed a cooling regimen to you, because you are blazing away there like Vesuvius. If you'll only condescend to come down from your hot-crater mood, I'll be as methodical and commonplace as a churchwarden. You are angry with me just as the man was angry at being saved from drowning by being dragged out of the water by his whiskers! Like him, you wanted to be taken up in a soft

blanket ! There's the whole of it. But you are not the only fellow I have met who expects that he is to be pulled from beneath the wheel of a 'bus without as much as a stain on his white trousers !

“Your aunt Dinah was going to endow a hospital. You saw the news in the papers, and read it out to me. You knew well enough what that meant—disinheritance pure and simple ! There was no time to be lost. To hold her hand was the first necessity ; time was precious : had I said that you were simply in another scrape—had lost some hundreds at play, or done some similar folly—it would have been, as I well knew, perfectly useless. Her natural reflection would have been, ‘How right am I to endow a charity, rather than squander my fortune amongst a set of spendthrifts.’ I saw I must touch a chord which had vibrated once more. I must try if it will not still be sensitive to the old impression. That dear loving heart will not have lost its sympathy with those who love, thought I, and so I married you—married you to the sweetest, loveliest creature in the world, with a dowry of a thousand francs in Servian ‘threes.’

“I knew well enough you would be in a precious rage with me when the whole was discovered. I was prepared for some rather bad language, and some very high and weighty airs. You have favoured me with the latter, and if you will only give me twenty minutes to swallow my breakfast, you

may have your wicked will of abuse of me till dinner-time!"

Though he said all this in an easy, jocular sort of way, it was not difficult to see that he was secretly deeply wounded at my want of gratitude for his attempt to serve me, and inwardly vowing it would be his last step in that direction. "At all events," said he in conclusion, "you have only to 'throw me over.' Write to Mrs Pritchard and say, 'Ponsonby's letter was a falsehood from beginning to end. I was fool enough to trust my cause to his hands, and this is what he has done for me. I can only assure you, my dearest aunt, that I was no party to the fraud practised on you; and though the reparation be a very poor one, I mean to cut the man who did it.'"

As he spoke he moved across the room, and throwing his pelisse on his arm, and gathering up his other stray articles of travelling gear, he turned to face me. "And now," said he, "I distinctly beg your pardon, and I hope you will not refuse me this as I say good-bye!"

I sprang towards him and cried out, "It is I have to ask forgiveness. It is I whose selfishness has so far blinded me that I have only seen one half of the sacrifice my friend has made for me. Forgive me, Ponsonby, I entreat you, and do not let me hate myself for ever."

Our reconciliation was complete, and so hearty,

so real, and so sincere that we were not driven to avoid the painful topic which had so excited us, but continued to talk it over for hours, and without a trace of the late unpleasant altercation.

"But what am I to do?" asked I; "how answer my aunt's letter?"

"For the moment do nothing. One of the ablest diplomatists we have in England once said to me, 'There are letters which should never be replied to till Time dictates the answer.' Who knows what a few days may bring forth? at all events, wait."

There was no great hardship in acceding to this counsel. I could "wait" where I then was without any very marked impatience, though how long I was to "wait," or what for, I had not the vaguest imaginable idea.

Ponsonby had so much to do now that for several days I scarcely saw him. We met, indeed, at breakfast, and I always awoke him when I returned home at night, to "report" myself, as he called it, and answer a host of questions he would put to me about my "goings on" at the convent, and whether my relations with Katinka were still confined within the limits of mere friendship.

The landlord had told Fred that I was watched; that I was always followed about by two or three men; and that such surveillance was generally the forerunner of something worse. In fact, he assured Ponsonby that if I set any value on my life, I had

no time to lose in getting away over the frontier. I will not say that I heard all this with indifference. I was fully aware that amongst the company I frequented there were men who bore me no especial goodwill. The marked favour with which I was admitted to Katinka's intimacy was an offence that many would have thought very cheaply atoned by my blood. Nor were they fellows to conceal their feelings—they very palpably let me know that I was no favourite amongst them.

Fred urged me to greater caution, particularly as to the hours I kept, for I rarely returned home before daybreak; but though I promised to be more circumspect, my heart was far too full of other thoughts to waste time on personal safety.

One night that I came back somewhat earlier than my wont, I found a man asleep across the threshold of the house-door—a not uncommon practice in countries where the slight shelter of a porch or an eave is deemed protection enough against the weather. In the act of pulling the bell I slightly touched him with my foot, but almost before I had time to say a word of excuse he had sprung to his feet, and dashed at me with a knife. The night being warm, I had carried my cloak on my arm, and in the thick folds of the cloth three stabs were quickly received, the last of which penetrated the cloak and went deep into my flesh. An exclamation of pain broke from me,

and at the instant a window opened over my head and two pistol-shots followed in quick succession. The ruffian broke away at once and fled, and ere I could bare my arm to see my wound Ponsonby was beside me.

It was an ugly cut, and severed one of the arteries. This was secured by a surgeon of the place, and the whole incident strictly shrouded in secrecy, for, as the landlord said, so long as nothing is spoken about these things, the assassins are always convinced that measures are being secretly concerted for vengeance. With my arm carefully bound up and carried in my waistcoat, I resumed my place next day at table, and only to Katinka herself did I relate the adventure.

Though she grew deadly pale and her lip trembled as I told my story, she said very little either in the way of condolence or regret. She urged me, however, to get away from Belgrade; she said these things were never done by halves there, that assassination was a regular trade, and the men who followed it for a livelihood were not worse looked on than scores of people who earned honest bread. I must own that when I declared I would never yield to a menace, nor shrink back before a peril, she looked at me with her great eyes wide and her lips parted, with an expression that to have won such I would have faced a hundred deaths.

About ten days after this occurred, as I was entering the breakfast-room one morning, Ponsonby met me, saying, "You heard the arrival this morning?"

"I should think I did—such tramping of horses' feet and such jingling of bells would have awoken the dead."

"But you don't know who has come?"

"No; I never asked."

"Your aunt Dinah! true, on my honour," added he, as I sank overpowered on the chair. "I take it that, not hearing from either of us, she was determined to come out and satisfy her own mind as to what was best to be done. At all events, here she is. 'Madame Pritchard, avec femme de chambre et courier,' are inscribed in the police-sheet, and I made the landlord ask for her Christian name, and here it is, written in her own hand, 'Dinah Pritchard.'"

"This is ruin!" cried I, as soon as I could speak.

"It's an *imbroglia*, certainly," said he; "a tangled bit of web to unravel, without doubt."

"Ruin, nothing less than ruin!" said I, in utter despair. "To have brought the dear old soul over all Europe just to tell her that she has been made the sport of a practical joke; to have taken her from her quiet home and involved her in all the fatigue and worry of a long journey; to have so

far worked upon her kind nature that she could rise above every consideration of self!—what pardon could she ever give to such heartless conduct?”

“I suppose you had better ‘bolt;’ get away at once, make for somewhere in Thessaly, or get into Montenegro—anywhere, so that you can’t be traced. I’ll make up the best story I can. I’ll say you are gone to get employment under Reshid Pasha, or take service with the Valattica. At all events, she shan’t follow you.”

I sat lost in meditation and in silence while he went over I knew not what arguments to enforce the counsel he had just given me. I could listen to nothing, for nothing could give me any comfort or any hope.

“I’ll go over and see Katinka,” said I at last. “She has a native finesse and acuteness in difficulties that we know little about.”

“I’ll not contest that point; but I don’t see how she is to help you here. You’ll scarcely like to tell her the story—the ‘fraud,’ as you were pleased to call it t’other day.”

Again was I overwhelmed with doubt and uncertainty; and not knowing where I went or what I was about to do, I sauntered down into the street and made for the convent. As I went slowly along, a thought struck me, at first very vaguely, afterwards it grew more consistent. What if Katinka would consent to aid me here? Why should she not pretend

—it need only be for a few days at farthest—to be my wife? My aunt's few words of French—and she possessed no other foreign language—would not make her a very acute cross-examiner; and the old grandmamma's age and infirmity would be reason enough for refusing all invitation to return with aunt Dinah to England.

To induce Katinka, however, to accept this part, I must be able to show her how vital it was to my interests—that it made the whole difference to me between affluence and beggary; but to do this I must also confess my deceit. To be sure, I could place before her the fact that if I had made an imprudent match, if I had induced a girl to share my poverty with me, my aunt would not have been unforgiving, and possibly this subtlety might reconcile her to the past.

I met Katinka in the garden. She was in one of her quiet thoughtful moods, and, encouraged by this, I at once revealed to her the story of my difficulty, frankly declaring that she alone could rescue me, and that only by her help and her mother wit could I escape ruin.

"What shall I have to do?" asked she, calmly, but promptly.

"Next to nothing. You'll drive over to the hotel and see my aunt. Your watchful care of grandmamma will always serve as a reason to make a short visit. Aunt Dinah's French will

put a great curb on conversation. At the outside her stay will not go beyond a week ; and when the question comes of going back with her——”

At this Katinka burst out into one of her joyous laughs, so that she could not hear a word I said.

“Mind,” said she, seriously, “if I consent, it is on one condition, and that is, that your friend Mr Ponsonby must never presume to regard me as your wife: if he venture on the very smallest freedom, if he ever give me to understand that he is an actor in this drama, which by right has but three characters, I’ll not only throw off my disguise, but I’ll unmask you all.”

I agreed to everything. I thanked her with a heart brimming over with gratitude ; and having talked over the whole project for above an hour, and settled that she should be at the hotel at two o’clock, I hurried back to see Ponsonby, and prepare all for the approaching visit.

Ponsonby was eagerly expecting me when I entered. Aunt Dinah had twice sent to ask for him, and he was forced to deny himself till he knew what line of action I had resolved on.

“Go up and tell her that we live—I and my wife—some distance out of town, but will be here to see her by two o’clock,” said I.

“What do you mean ?” asked he, in amazement.

“Just what I have said,” repeated I ; “by two

o'clock, if not earlier." And now I briefly related the project we had conceived, and cautioned him strictly as to the reserve he should impose upon himself. He only remarked, with a slight irritation of tone, "Mdlle. Katinka's experiences of the 'tact' of a gentleman seem unfortunate."

"Come up with me, Bob," said he, after a pause; "I'd rather you spoke of your wife's coming than myself. I have done enough in this affair;" and the next moment I was in my dear old aunt's arms.

Her kindness and affection were unbounded, and though she owned that the long journey had wearied her greatly, she declared that if she knew she was to take us back with her she would think no more of her fatigues. Ponsonby, too, she liked greatly, and pressed him warmly to come and see her in Wales. We had got to talk so pleasantly, and had so much to say to each other, that it was two o'clock actually ere we knew it. Just as the pendule struck over the chimney, a gentle tap came to the door. The courier opened it, and Katinka entered. She was beautifully dressed in her national costume, and looking more lovely than I had ever seen her. My aunt clasped her in her arms in an ecstasy of delight, as she called out, "Oh, she is a queen!" Ponsonby, out of delicacy, soon withdrew, and we were left alone together. We talked till past four o'clock, I translating for the most part

what my aunt said in English, and giving Katinka's replies. To be present at one of my cousins' weddings, aunt Dinah was forced to return at once, and as we could not possibly leave grandmamma at a moment, the great discussion was when we might be expected. "Berto," said Katinka to me, calling me by my Christian name for the first time, "will settle everything."

"Doubtless, love," said I, for once daring to call her so, "we will arrange it together." Aunt Dinah frightened us, however, by saying she did not think she could bring herself to return without us, and rather than do so she would forego my cousin's wedding.

"When may I see grandma, darling?" asked she of Katinka.

"Come when you like — come this evening. Berto will fetch you."

"Then I will come this evening; and here, dearest, is something for you. Robert will put it into the carriage for you," and she handed me a small leather case strongly clasped in silver. I had to give Katinka a meaning look to prevent her at once refusing it. As we drove back to the convent I opened the case, and found it contained a necklace and ear-rings of pearls the most splendid I ever beheld.

"Oh, Berto! what pearls!" cried Katinka, and her cheek flushed crimson, whether at the thought

of the gems, or at remembering the deceit by which they were even momentarily in our hands. "Shut them up; don't let me look more at them," said she, half angrily. "I am ashamed of what we have been doing, and she so good and so kind."

I never knew Katinka so cross as on that evening. She did not speak of my aunt at all, but constantly adverted to tricky people, and the way in which their natures became, so to say, honeycombed by intrigue. For once in my life I was vexed with her, and we parted almost in anger.

The post of the next morning brought a most urgent letter to my aunt, entreating her not to fail to be present at my cousin's wedding, which was fixed for an earlier day than she had thought.

"Go and fetch Katinka," said she to me, "and see if I could not persuade her to come back with me for the wedding. She shall return here at once to grandmamma if we could not induce her to come with us."

"There," said I, half sulkily, to Katinka, "one visit more, and your disagreeable fiction is ended. My aunt starts to-night."

"Don't forget to restore the pearls. Take them with you," said she, tartly.

"I don't care what becomes of them, or of myself either," said I. "I only wish the fellow's knife had been better aimed the other night."

"You are in a sweet temper."

"It's all the more like my wife's," said I, grimly.

"Well, I'm glad the farce is nigh over," said she, with a haughty toss of her head. "I'll not readily forgive myself for the ignoble part I have played in it."

"You may console yourself by remembering that I shall derive no benefit whatever from your condescension."

"No benefit!—what! when she leaves you all her estate!"

"I'll not accept one shilling of it. I have a letter here to post the day she leaves this. I have confessed to her the whole deception I have practised on her. I have returned the last remittance she sent me, and bidden her adieu for ever."

"To go whither?—to do what?"

"To quarrel with the first fellow who'll cut my throat for me!"

"Benone!" said she, smiling sardonically. "Che bel temperamento!"

"What have I to live for? what to care for? I am ruined!—I have not a *sou* in the world—no one needs me—no one wants me: the only one, that dear old aunt, who would grieve for me, shall not hear of my fate. But come along—let us pay our visit, and let the curtain drop over the dreary comedy. Oh, Katinka!" cried I, as the tears rose to my eyes, and fell heavily along my cheeks—"oh, Katinka, if you could have loved me—if you

could ever have accepted my love, and let my life have been joined to your life! From being the most wretched of men I would have been the happiest."

She did not utter a word, but stood with her eyes downcast, silent and motionless.

"Be mine!" cried I, "for a day—for an hour: let me feel that as I go to death I have won the greatest prize of my existence, and I swear to you that if you bear my name to-day, you shall mourn me as my heir to-morrow."

"I don't think the prospect is very enticing," said she, slowly, "though I suppose you intended it as such."

"Come along!" cried I, angrily, for her air of coldness had stung me to the quick—"let me finish with this mockery. Let us say good-bye to my aunt."

"I'm ready," said she, taking up her shawl: "will you see grandmamma, and ask her when she will receive your aunt?"

I nodded silently, and followed her up the stairs. The old lady was seated in her accustomed place near a window, a slip of paper and pencil beside her, as her deafness was now complete.

"Signor Berto wants to know when you will permit his aunt to call on you, grandma," wrote Katinka, and the old lady made a gesture to imply at any time she liked to come.

“Have you any other question to ask grandma?” said Katinka, with a strange, half-droll twinkle in her eyes.

“Yes,” said I, fiercely, for I was almost savage in my mood. “Ask her if she will consent that you should be my wife.”

Katinka took the pencil and wrote some words: the old lady turned and motioned to us to kneel down. We did so at her feet, and, kissing us both on the forehead, she blessed us fervently, and joined our hands together. “Are you content?” whispered Katinka to me; but I could not speak. I threw my arms rapturously around her and pressed her to my heart—mine, my own for ever.

The Greek priest who lived in the convent celebrated our marriage within the hour, and when we drove back to the hotel the drama had become a reality, and I was the most blessed of mankind.

CHARLES LEVER.

WRECKED OFF THE RIFF COAST.

BY ALEXANDER INNES SHAND.

[MAGA. OCTOBER 1875.]

LIKE most of the towns of Spain and the Orient, Tangiers looks very inviting from the sea, and loses considerably on intimate acquaintance. Nothing can be more attractive than the dazzling houses rising tier over tier in the glossy green of the orange-groves, girdled by the grey walls and guarded by the frowning battlements of the fortress, with the whitewash of the whited sepulchre gleaming in the golden glow of an African sunset. And nothing can be much more repulsive than the interior of the tumble-down old city, especially of a rainy day, when each broken causeway comes down in filthy flood, and the hanging house-eaves are gushing in dingy water-spouts. The rains should wash the place, and no doubt they do; but it would take the flooding of many monsoons to cleanse that Augean stable. For the plateaux above are loaded with the miscellaneous deposits of the dry season, and the refuse and the garbage

that have been neglected by the jackals and vultures are gradually working their way towards the sea.

It had come to be our solitary excitement looking out of the windows of the small hotel, and speculating on what would next be whirled past us in the gutter. For we had been storm-bound in Tangiers for four mortal days, ringing the changes between moods savage and sulky, under the disappointment of blighted schemes for sport. We had crossed from "the Rock" in the cattle-boat, with light portmanteaus and heavy cases of ammunition; with central-fire breech-loaders, rifles, and revolvers. We had talked confidently at the mess-table of bloody bags, made up of everything from wild boar to woodcock. Arrived at Tangiers, we had interviewed the legation in the absence of its chief, and arranged for the escort of a Moslem soldier, detailed on the duty of answering for our heads with his own by the local representative of the Moorish vicegerent of Allah. Having secured this orthodox warrior's services, we should have felt bound in honour to find him employment, even had we been less eager to be up and doing for our own sakes. Twice we had saddled for the field and sallied resolutely out of the gates, under the gaze of the white-bearded elders who smoked and gossiped in their shadow. The first time we had been driven back by the falling floods before we had got well beyond the shelter of the consular garden-

walls. On the second occasion we had pushed somewhat farther. Encouraged by some watery blinks of sunshine, and fondly persuading ourselves that the heavens were shutting their sluices, we had persevered against our sounder judgment until it became plain that there had been nothing but a temporary obstruction. It was anything but an agreeable ride, as the wiry little barbs went labouring fetlock-deep through the holding ground, straining their sinewy loins as their hind-legs slipped from beneath them, and now and again half disappearing in a slough that seemed to surge up almost to the saddle-girths. The streamlets we forded were coming down in spate; the stagnant canals were brimming over with brown water; the gardens and enclosures were steaming in the tepid air; the solemn storks themselves looked more than ordinarily disconsolate, as if they were being hard put to it to pick up a living in spite of their lengthy legs and necks. Not more disconsolate, however, than Hamet, our soldier-guard, as he did his best to cover the priming of his primitive matchlock and pistol in the folds of his draggle-tailed *haik*. Yet persevere we did, till we drew bridle under the lee of the whitewashed tomb of some sainted *marabout*, which looked a likely place to make the best of our luncheon-breakfast. It was but a melancholy meal, however, as we bivouacked on spongy grass under the drip of the palm-boughs.

We felt somewhat the cheerier for applications to the sherry-bottles and cognac-flasks, which there was no object whatever in economising; for the moment the meal was at an end we were again in our soaking saddles, bent on escaping back from the plague of water into the comparative comforts of the city we were sick of. Hamet led the way home at a hand-gallop, although the heaviest weight and the most indifferently mounted of the party. But the weather and the example of his unbelieving employers had been too much for his principles. He had set at defiance the unsociable law of his prophet, and indulged in draughts that were the sweeter for being forbidden. And there he was, shoving along in advance of us, recklessly driving his rusty stirrups into his charger's smoking flanks, and laying the road and showers of mud behind him, regardless of protests, threats, and imprecations.

Plastered with the mud, and dripping from head to heel, the pitiful *mon Dieu* of our sympathising little landlord had welcomed us home, as we came straggling up the steep street that led to his hostelry. Since then, we had scarcely set foot across his threshold. The rain had been descending remorselessly as ever; depression had passed into despondency, and despondency settled into despair. Hamet, who had haunted the passage like an embodied reproach, had at last been dismissed with a

suitable guerdon. Our sporting experiences in Morocco had sufficed us. Even should the weather hold up, it must be days before the waters could subside; and our one idea was to effect a retreat, and find ourselves back again among our friends of the garrison.

It is true that we might have been worse off. So much of an admission was wrung out of us as we drew our chairs to the dinner-table of an evening, in the cheery little parlour with the bright chintz paper and gay crimson hangings, with the ormolu clock and candles on the chimney-piece, and the battle-piece of Solferino suspended over the fire where the President of the Republic in his *garance*-coloured pantaloons, was flourishing his *bâton* among volumes of smoke. The little dinner, served to admiration, made way for a voluptuous dessert. On the table were dates and figs, bananas and Tangerine oranges, sparkling crystal, and wax-lights in silver candelabra, long-necked bottles of ruby Bordeaux, with a squat decanter of topaz-tinged Manzanilla. But brightest of all was the visage of our lively host, M. Dumolard, who was easily prevailed upon to gratify us with his company, and who prattled away merrily when he had fairly slipped himself out of his prim court suit of decorous reserve.

It was on the fifth evening of our sojourn that M. Dumolard, for the third time, had made a movement to withdraw, observing incidentally—

“I will assure you, Sares, she shall not sail before to-morrow at mid-day ; I come from seeing M. the Captain, and he tells me the half of the cattle are not charged as yet. There was a piece of the *bétail* passing down the street but now ; Messieurs must assuredly have heard them.”

So saying, M. Dumolard bowed himself away ; and as he closed the door, Jack Roper remarked to me, “I’m quite as well pleased we shan’t have to make an early start of it, although I believe I should burn myself the brain, as Dumolard would say, if we had forty-eight hours more of this infernal purgatory. By the way, I hope the wind may fall as fast as it got up,”—for, just at that moment, a gust caught hold of the great fig-tree outside and rattled its branches against the casement.

Now any one who had the pleasure of Roper’s acquaintance in happier days—Captain Roper, V.C., of the —th battery of her Majesty’s Royal Regiment of Artillery—would have been sorely puzzled to recognise that genial officer in the morose accents of the foregoing speech. For no one had been in the way of taking life more happily, or had looked more instinctively on the brighter side of things. As he had been but a few short months before, even monotonous confinement through five wearisome wet days would have sat upon him exceedingly lightly, without the creature-comforts he enjoyed

and the agreeable companion who shared his evil fortune. But through the last few months Roper had been changing fast, and thereby there hangs the present yarn.

His reputation had gone before him when he got the route for "Gib," and men who only knew him by name were prepared to give him a cordial greeting. In the course of a week or so, he was "Jack" before his face to the merry set he was shaking down among; while all the rest of the world of the garrison men called him nothing but Jack behind his back. He had a laughing eye and an open manner, with the faintest suspicion of an *arrière pensée*—something that warned you he could resent a liberty if need were. He was fairly good at most things, from rackets and billiards to waltzes and whist: he was an earnest and indiscriminate admirer of the fair sex—by the way, the prevailing tints of the Rock and the garrison ranged between olive and the yellow of parchment—but the ravages on his heart by each evening's flirtation were generally repaired with the morning's reflections. He had a modest certainty beyond his pay, with considerable expectations from a capricious uncle. So naturally he was weighted with a load of pecuniary embarrassments, although he contrived to carry it with unimpaired equanimity.

So life went smoothly with him at Gibraltar as it had gone elsewhere, till of a sudden its placid tenor

was ruffled. It was on a certain evening when yawning at the theatre that he set eyes upon the object of his grand passion without a presentiment of his coming fate. He merely admired as he was much in the way of admiring. It certainly struck him as odd next morning—not that the beauty of the evening had been smiling on him in his waking dreams, but that he had asked no one the night before who was the pretty girl opposite. Perhaps, had it been his habit to analyse the philosophy of his feelings, it might have occurred to him that the impression being deeper than he suspected, he had shrunk from the apprehension of hearing something either to his disadvantage—or hers. She might have been engaged, or married, or on a flying visit—possibly no better than she should be.

He met her again on the Alameda that very afternoon, and she bore the sunshine as well as the gas-light. She was accompanied, too, by the same elderly gentleman who had mounted guard over her at the theatre; but Roper had no eyes for her companion; and, as it happened, the friend who was lounging on his arm had no eyes for any one else.

“Osalez! by all that’s infernal!” that gentleman exclaimed in considerable perturbation, pivoting round abruptly and carrying his companion with him. “What! you don’t know Osalez?” he proceeded, in answer to Roper’s inquiries and ex-

postulations. "Then all I can say is, that is very lucky for you. Bless my soul! he is as much of a public character as his Excellency. Perhaps there isn't a gentleman on the coasts of the Peninsula and Barbary to boot with a more miscellaneous acquaintance—and that's saying something. Osalez! why, he's reprobate of all trades and respectable in none—merchant, money-lender, smuggler, banker, broker—ay, and you may say butcher too. For he contracts to victual the garrison, and he coals the fleet. He goes shares with the contrabandistas, and he squares it somehow with the civil guard. He'll fly kites for anybody who makes it worth his while; but somehow when it's Osalez that raises the wind you're apt to be swept off your legs in a hurricane. Yes, you may say it's scandal"—for Jack had interposed with unusual cogency of argument, and still more unwonted excitement, pointing out that sleeping partners with smugglers were scarcely likely to obtain Government contracts—"you may call it scandal, and I don't profess to speak dispassionately, for he has more than one bill of mine, and he won't hear of renewing. But where there's a deal of smoke there must be fire, and Osalez lives in a most sulphureous atmosphere—ask any one."

To cut a long story short—a story Roper had latterly bored me with so often, that I had thoroughly mastered all its details—though he did not

follow up the conversation that gave him so little satisfaction, he was not to be deterred from an introduction to the beautiful Hebrew. Perseverance had its reward. Often baffled, he succeeded at last, but it was even less easy to improve the acquaintance when he had made it. There was a yawning chasm between the gay young officer and a lady in the ambiguous position of the lovely and wealthy Miss Osalez; and the gossips of the garrison watched his efforts to bridge it with the keenest and most curious interest. The Osalez went out but little into society. Regarded as pariahs by English sets, they held their heads far above the "Scorpions;" and when Jack had manœuvred himself into one or two meetings with them, recklessly risking the loss of caste, he found himself opening the trenches in the light of day, under the eye of an exceedingly watchful parent. It was a standing puzzle to him, and a source of perpetual irritation, how that shy fluttering beauty, who divined his admiration and did not seem to dislike it, whose lustrous eyes flashed and fell, and whose colour went and came under his ardent glances, could ever have been bred in such a vulture's nest. For Osalez was as unlike his offspring as might be, and had nothing whatever of the gentle or prepossessing about him. Short and stern, squat and grizzled, something like a sherry-butt rolling along on a couple of quarter-casks, you could only

read his race and religion in the *cachet* that nature had stamped upon his nose.

No wonder Esther was shy and fluttered, that the usually offhand Roper was extremely ill at ease, or that the shrewd Osalez never relaxed his observations on those very rare occasions when the trio came together in society. Roper's presence provoked remark and piqued curiosity. The whole room was wide awake to the unaccustomed visitor, as well as to the little drama that was going forward. Osalez felt he was being made a fool of. He feared, a little too late perhaps, that the same thing might possibly happen to his daughter; and finally, as the situation grew insupportably tense, he drew her away into absolute seclusion.

Not being overburdened with military duties, Roper had leisure to indulge his despondency. Although Gibraltar is geographically Andalusian, the place is thoroughly English in pipeclay, pickets, rounds, and police arrangements. There is small toleration for serenades and rope-ladders. There is little of that "plucking the turkey," where the Peninsular lover presses and kisses the hands of his adored one through the ponderous window-bars that form her cage. Mr Abraham Osalez lived in a charming cottage villa looking across to Ape's Hill—all bay-window, verandas, and trailing clusters of creepers. But Miss Esther was as sequestered in it as if she had been double locked in a grilled and

duenna-guarded chamber of Cadiz, with the windows turned inwards on a Moorish *patio*.

In these desperate circumstances, Roper decided on a dashing *coup*—as he told his story to the present narrator, whom he had installed as his confidant, *bon gré, mal gré*.

“So, as matters had come to a dead lock, I thought the best thing I could do was to make Osalez’s acquaintance professionally. He wasn’t likely to decline to accommodate me on the ground of my being over-sweet upon his daughter; while, on the other hand, you know, it might increase his objection to me, if he heard that I had carried my custom past the family. And the connection seemed likely to be worth having; for, to tell the truth, since I had set eyes on the Rose of Sharon, I had taken to revoking at whist, and all manner of follies, and it was high time I made arrangements for replenishing my purse. As the novels have it, Osalez was civil but distant when I made my advances, and I can’t say he showed me any great consideration on account of the romantic sympathy that drew me to him. Since then we have had no end of interviews, but the conversation has confined itself strictly to bills and discount—and now——”

“And now?”

“Now it seems to me I’ve been making stern-way rather than otherwise. I see more of Shylock than I like, and just as little as ever of the lady.”

So it had gone on. Now, as far as I could gather—and Roper would be only too diffuse in his confidences—Osalez was revenging himself in the way of business on the handsome young gunner for all the domestic bother he was causing; and if that were really the Hebrew's game, it must be confessed that Jack played into his hands. What with blighted love, and accumulating money worries, from being merely profuse he grew absolutely reckless. Whether he liked it or no, he had to seek more and more frequent interviews with the hard-fisted father of his Jessica, and the more he saw of him the less he liked him. The odd part of it was, that his growing antipathy for the parent was anything but an antidote to his fancy for the child: in an atmosphere that might so easily have nipped it, his love flourished as luxuriantly as the tropical vegetation on the Alameda; and what had begun like a hundred other caprices, had gradually grown into an absorbing sentiment. So between his attraction and repulsion for and from the Osalez family, Roper was falling off in flesh and spirits: friends and acquaintances began to drop away from him; the regimental doctor prescribed change of scene, and as he would not be persuaded to exile himself to England, he had got up this flying trip to Tangiers.

And there we are back again, after this long digression, awaiting the precarious departure of

the cattle boat, which lay taking in her cargo in the bay. Dumolard was gone down-stairs, and Jack was on the fidget in his arm-chair.

"I think I'll just stretch my legs before turning in: one sleeps all the better for being blown about a bit."

"Nonsense, my good fellow. Why, you'll never keep your cigar alight in the wind. The rain has hardly held up for an hour past, and you can hear the street coming down in flood."

But Jack was on his feet and obdurate: Osalez himself could not have been more impracticable, and, after all, the point was scarcely worth arguing. In a few seconds he was back again, looking rather pale and excessively savage.

"Stumbled across a ghost?" I inquired with some curiosity.

"No such luck," he answered with vindictive vehemence. "I'd sooner be haunted any day in the spirit than the flesh. Whom do you think I ran up against, just outside the door, of all impossible people?"

"Why, by the way you take it, I can only suppose it was that eternal *bête noire* of yours, that sets you on to worry me in season and out of season. And though I see no particular reason why he should not be in Tangiers, it does seem unlikely he should be abroad in this weather and at such an hour. A case of mistaken identity I

expect, or perhaps a spectral apparition produced by a morbid imagination, acting on a couple of bottles of claret. I can't say on an empty stomach, although you are so desperately——"

"Hang it, man, it's past a joke. There's a coincidence, a destiny—what do you call it?—about it. I tell you I spoke to him, and made him answer me."

"Well, I suppose I must give in to the evidence of a couple of your senses, for spectres seldom speak when they are spoken to, and I never heard that ordinary hallucinations go on from sight to sound. As I said, why should Osalez not be here? He must have irons in the fire at Tangiers as well as everywhere else. But if he has, you may be sure that old gossip, Dumolard, can tell us all about it, and something more. So ring the bell, and let's have him up again."

M. Dumolard proved to the full as well informed as I gave him credit for being.

"You ask if Monsieur has met M. Osalez. But I believe it well; and why not? While the gentlemen have been detained with me, where, I dare to hope, they have found themselves not too ill," observed M. Dumolard, parenthetically, with a comprehensive bow, "M. Osalez, by a hazard, has been sojourning opposite. M. Mordecai, my neighbour, is of the same faith; and indeed I believe is of M. Osalez's parents. In every case

M. Osalez has been there, as I tell you, and his daughter also—*très belle fille, parbleu!* I was admiring her from my belvidere but yesterday, when the heaven cleared itself, for a moment——”

“What!” shouted Roper, springing out of the chair into which he had subsided, and making the clock and candles clatter with the violence with which he threw himself against the chimney-piece —“what! you saw Miss Osalez yesterday; and you never told me a word of it. Pshaw! what am I talking of? I beg your pardon, Mr Dumolard: I forgot you knew nothing; how should you? You were saying, I think, that you saw the lady——”

And Jack had the nerve to recover his control as quickly as he had lost it; so that Dumolard, who had at first been scared at the mine he had sprung most innocently, quickly grew flattered at the extreme interest vouchsafed him, and exerted himself to gratify the curiosity he had piqued. The sum of his long story was, that it was by no means surprising M. Osalez should be here at Tangiers. Quite the contrary. He did more trade with the town than any half-dozen other merchants put together. He had a contract for provisioning the English garrison. “By Jove! and that’s true,” interposed Roper. He had a half share in the boat we meant to embark upon. And so on, and so on. M. Dumolard had plenty to tell; and all he had

to tell went to magnify the means of the Hebrew speculator.

After that last interpellation of his, Jack seemed somewhat *distract*. M. Dumolard's facile sympathies and quick perception had told him that the handsome young Englishman's distraction had its origin in a profound interest in the beauty over the way, and to him accordingly he had addressed his animated narrative.

But chilled by the preoccupation that paid so little heed, his voluble talk flowed more and more sluggishly until, at last, with a slight but expressive motion of his shoulders, he relapsed into resentful silence.

Then my friend took the word, and, with a Machiavellian astuteness for which I should never have given him credit, addressed the Frenchman with the frankness that sat so naturally on him, but with a studied courtesy very foreign to his manners.

"You can do me a great service, M. Dumolard, if you will allow me to make a friend of you, and give you my confidence. I am persuaded I can rely absolutely on your discretion."

Our little host was equally flattered and gratified. His face wrinkled amiably as it wreathed itself in friendly smiles; and he stood there bowing and scraping with his jewelled hand pressed upon his flowered waistcoat. It was plain that Jack had

bound him to him, body and soul. So there Jack was away at score with the oft-told story—so much of it at least as suited his purpose; and he wound up with an “and now, M. Dumolard, if you only will, you can do me an inestimable service.”

“Monsieur has but to command,” M. Dumolard rejoined, courteously.

“It strikes me, you see, that as Osalez has so much to do with this boat he means most likely to go over in her.”

“And Mademoiselle also—nothing more probable,” assented M. Dumolard; “specially as he is always immersed in his affairs and enormously pressed for time.”

“Exactly so. Now as he is master of the situation, and may send down sailing-orders at any moment, he’s safe to try to steal a march, and leave us planted here; and I’m sure it would be impossible to be more comfortable anywhere,” he added, politely, as an after-thought.

Dumolard, however, looked sorely puzzled at the British idioms Jack had slipped into. Jack saw it, tried back, translated, and went on again. “The captain promised to let us know in time—he’d do it too, I think, if it were left to him, if there be gratitude in man or honesty in faces. He smoked a dozen or so of my best *partagas* coming across, and said he liked them; but——”

“But M. Osalez is the master after all, as you

have said—a man who will have his orders attended to. However, gentlemen, confide yourselves to me. Mohammed shall go over to M. Mordecai's and inform himself. He is, as it were, a child of the household. Meanwhile, I shall despatch Achmet to the shore, and learn what they are doing on the steamer."

So spoke our zealous ally; and it was no sooner said than done. In ambush behind the darkened window-blind, Jack could watch the effect of Mohammed's mission. Not a gleam of light from the lattices opposite. The envoy knocked at the jealously-barred postern—first gently, and then as loudly as he dared. Not a sign of life on the part of the servants. It was clear the garrison had its orders—more than probable that this unnatural quiet portended a *sortie* later. So Jack took it; and speedily he was bustling about the baggage. Suspicions changed to certainty on Achmet's return. He had seen the Mary Anne with her steam up. There might have been reasons for that, besides the prospect of an early start; it was wildish weather and a shifty wind for a vessel lying in such open anchorage. But to make all sure, Achmet had boarded her with a boat-load of pilgrims, and then he heard from the crew that they expected to be off by morning.

"*Canaille of a capitaine! va!*" ejaculated Dumolard, apostrophising the absent skipper; "it's al-

ways agreed between us that he inform me of the departure of the boat." And Jack was chiming in with some anathemas of his own, when there came a tinkle at the door bell. It was the arrival of an anonymous and dirty scrawl that had been deposited in Mohammed's hands by a mysterious messenger.

"The Mary Anne may be at sea by the morning; and you had best burn this bit of writing."

"Our ally the Scotch captain's fist and caution, for a thousand! Now, M. Dumolard, there's not a shadow of a doubt. Don't let a soul be seen stirring. Have your people ready to carry our traps. Trust to me to keep a bright look-out; and when once our friends opposite are fairly under weigh, we'll slip down silently on their line of march."

And the lover was transformed into another man, all life and spirit, in place of languid indifference. He positively rubbed his hands at the prospect of a rough night on the straits, with but a plank between him and his mistress—to say nothing of a drenching for them both by way of prelude. As for Dumolard, he had caught fire at the other's excitement. I believe both of them would have forgotten all about the bill had not Mohammed and I been there to remind them.

Roper was an easy-going fellow generally—one of the last men you would have suspected of nerves—yet I fancied I could hear his heart thumping on

his ribs at the creaking of those heavy bolts of Mordecai's. As for Dumolard, he was dancing behind us like a dervish, now standing on tiptoe to peer out between our shoulders, now doubling himself up for a peep from under our arms. I was interested myself, I confess, for there was a strong dash of romance about the scene that was enacting. Hour, one of the clock, or somewhat over. A pale moon riding overhead among watery clouds that generally had the better of her. The plash of the rain. The wind meaning fitfully in the complaining boughs ; and not another sound in the sleeping city, save the howl of a dog, or, it might be, the bark of a jackal. A Moorish archway opening into a *patio*, where you caught a glimpse of a sparkling fountain among the sombre orange-trees ; the interior lit partly by the fitful moonshine, partly by the reflection of torches flashing in the passages. Moors were coming and going in their snowy raiment ; and finally, Roper squeezed my arm hard as a couple of female figures emerged on donkeys, in Frankish waterproofs and under Frankish umbrellas. There was no mistake about the man's imagining himself in love, otherwise he would never have griped me as he did.

The procession got stealthily under weigh, having taken every precaution to attract no notice from our hostelry, which to all appearance must have been buried in slumber. The muzzles of the donkeys

were muffled in shawls. The glare of the torches was masked by umbrellas. Enveloped in a Spanish cloak, Osalez stuck close by his daughter's stirrup, drawing her wrappings carefully around her. We could see him throw a glance at our windows as he turned out of the yard. As for the lady, whatever she might have known or suspected, she never lifted her eyes.

Roper's head was out of the window before the last of the porters with the bags and the boxes had fairly disappeared round the corner of the house. When we set out in pursuit, it was all we could do to prevail on him to give them law enough, and let them commit themselves fairly to the deep before he ran into them on the steamer. "And after all," as I reminded him, "even once we are on board, I don't see you'll be much advanced. Depend on it, Osalez is Turk enough to condemn the beauty to close seclusion for the passage. I lay you five to one in ponies, if you like, the captain gives her over the cabin you scented so fragrantly with those pet *partagas* of yours."

Jack declined the bet, observing sadly that I might just as well make the five fifty; but added, more hopefully, that he would trust in luck and accidents to bring them together before the voyage was over. He spoke prophetically, as the sequel will show.

I have tried my hand at a sketch of Scene No. 1

—"The Start." Its *pendant*, Scene 2—"The Embarkation"—was even more characteristic. The moon riding overhead as before, but by this time with a more angry halo round her disc, and her wan rays more sinister in their glitter. The waters of the bay heaving and tumbling in breaking outlines that communicated a sympathetic thrill to the diaphragm—the "tideless sea" rolling in upon the beach with a fair imitation of an ugly surf, and a dismal grinding and churning among the pebbles. Considering the bay was half land-locked as the wind came, the strength of the ground-swell spoke volumes for what might be awaiting us outside. We had stopped short under the shadow of the rickety houses that swept in a broken crescent round the shore, to observe the proceedings of the party in advance. Had Osalez shown the white feather at the eleventh hour, I for one should have been exceedingly glad of it.

But it was clear that the Jew's mind was made up to play Lord Ullin's daughter with the parts reversed; equally so that the lady's lover had no idea of being left on the shore lamenting.

The torches had been extinguished; still there was moonlight enough to let us distinguish all that passed. A stalwart Moslem, tearing off his dripping *haik*, stood revealed in clinging shirt and pantaloons. He caught up in his muscular arms what Jack affirmed to be the fairy form of Miss

Osalez, although the bundle might have been a bale of waterproof for all one could tell to the contrary. He balanced himself on his bare and stalwart legs ; trode gingerly into the surf, embarrassed as he was with the precious burden, and bent his oscillating steps towards a boat that was rocking uneasily among the billows.

"The idiot's over with her, by ——," ejaculated Roper, as the Moor made a stumble. And he would have rushed to the rescue, regardless of consequences, had not I made a snatch at his arm in time.

"The Moor's as sure-footed as the barb you bucketed so unmercifully a couple of days ago. The lady's as safe, at all events in the meantime, as if she were in bed at her kinsman Mordecai's, as I devoutly wish she were : how it may be towards the small hours is another question, and if you want to be near her when the danger may be real, you had better, for the present, keep as quiet as may be."

Indeed it was plain that the Moor knew his business, and once started he went as steadily as his comrade who was bestridden by the respectable Osalez in person. The boat took them all on board with their belongings, and went pitching away till we lost it in the uncertain light. Now it was our turn. Mordecai's myrmidons had hurried home and left the coast clear. We had taken a most touching farewell of Dumolard, who seemed to enjoy being

soaked in serving a love-affair ; not many minutes more and we were rolling in comparatively calm water under the bulging counter of the *Mary Anne*.

"Passengers" was our answer to the hail from the deck ; but it was not till after the look-out had been appealed to again, that the order was given to let down the side-ropes—we fancied we could hear Osalez in suppressed wrath, while the captain was soothing him in hoarse whispers.

Bluff and weather-beaten sea-dog as he was, that old Scotch skipper had the makings of an actor in him. He came forward into the circle of light thrown by the mate's lantern, looking to any one behind him, so far as his pea-jacketed shoulders were concerned, the very embodiment of astonishment and gruff discontent. But for us, there was a twinkle in his eye that belied his language, as he growled out his surprise at our arrival.

"Never supposed you gentlemen were in any haste to be gone : didn't dream you'd be for quitting your comfortable quarters and the weather like to be so coarse."

Jack acknowledged the signal the captain threw out with a faint quiver of his own eyelid.

"Haste indeed ! you had our message, hadn't you ? You don't suppose we sentenced ourselves to close confinement in this infernal hole till the weather should clear."

"Well, then, Captain, I was mistaken, as it would

seem, and there's an end of that ; unless, indeed, you would be for putting cannily back again, now you've had some small foretaste of what we may expect round the point. You won't, you say ? Very well, then, he that will to Cupar maun to Cupar ; but I doubt you'll be scarcely so well put up this time as the last. My bit of a cabin's bespoke ; and you'll find some queer-like characters in the saloon."

Some quick confidences that passed in the obscure companion gave the shrewd skipper a fair notion of how the land lay. At all events, when diving down through the darkness we emerged below in comparative light, I believe it was felt on both sides that we understood each other. The "saloon," as the master was pleased to term it, was far from a tempting apartment in any circumstances. The white-painted boarding of the panels was guiltless of all pretence of decoration. The dingy ceiling was smoked black in the centre by the vilely smelling lamp that was swinging beneath it. It was lucky, perhaps, considering the manners of its present occupants, that there was but a tattered scrap of wax-cloth on the floor, for on the benches that ran along the sides of the ship and encircled the battered deal table, were seated a strange company indeed, most of them smoking freely, and all dispensing with spittoons.

"Ay, they're a gey queer lot," repeated the captain, *sotto voce*, "gin only you could make them

out more clearly through the reek. But with the weather and hindrances in the lading, and one thing or another, we've been keepit here longer time than usual, and so they orra folk have been gathering in about. These Jews there " here he sunk his voice to a whisper—"are desperate hard set on the money-getting; and wasting time is like wringing out their very heart's blood, otherwise they would hardly be so fond to go across with us, for they've just a most desperate antipathy to the sea."

"You don't think there's danger, captain?" I inquired.

"Danger, no, not to say danger: gin there had been, I would never have taken my orders to sail from old Osalez, with that bonny bit lassie of his brought on board, for, after all, it's me that's responsible. Lord preserve me! what was I saying, gentlemen? Mr Osalez laid his injunctions on me—well, never mind, we're friends here after all, I hope, and gentlemen forbye; but as I was saying, for danger there's none; but discomfort's another thing, and with the wind and the water sougling and sucking us in to the Riff shore, it may be longer before we make the Rock than some of they fair-weather gentlemen will care about."

"Oh if that's all!" exclaimed Roper. He had been standing on full point at the door that divided this very common outer court from the inner sanctuary that shrined his idol. "Oh, if that's all!" and he

turned greatly relieved to have a look at our fellow-passengers. An odd lot they were, as the captain had remarked. Small as was the cabin, its atmosphere was so dense that we could scarcely embrace them in a single *coup d'œil*, but we could examine them more at leisure as we made our way along between them and the table. There were stately Moors in their floating white draperies, with searching black eyes, sallow complexions, and sharpened features, staring before them in *farouche* tranquillity and reminding me greatly of eagle-owls on the perch. All of them, I remarked, had singularly white and well-shaped hands, especially one venerable Santon with a snowy beard, who clearly had never put those hands of his to use, although possibly with perpetual genuflexions his knees might be hardened to horn. There was a merchant or two of pure Berber blood, attired very similarly to the Moors, although there was no mistaking the different types of figures. There were a couple of thoroughbred negroes from the remote palm-groves of Timbuctoo, dealing in dates as their staple commodity, though probably speculating in flesh and blood on occasion. There was a Berberised Frenchman, most likely a renegade. But the lives and souls of the motley party were those countrymen of Osalez that the skipper had alluded to. Some of them by their dress, settlers in Barbary; some of them from the Spanish sea-ports; not a few natural-

ised scorpions of the Rock,—they were jabbering to each other of gains and exchanges and every topic connected with money-getting, so far as we could make sense of their *lingua mixta*. One or two salutations I acknowledged from individuals whose faces seemed tolerably familiar to me, though I had never traded with them for cash, cigars, or anything else. But if we could make anything out plainly in that dim pandemonium, it was that we could not possibly stay below in it. Better a fresh hurricane from heaven any day, and beds on the sloppy decks *à la belle étoile*.

It might be pretty poetry talking of beds *à la belle étoile*, but looking at the matter practically they were altogether out of the question. The decks were as much encumbered as the cabin. The fore part of the ship was given up, of course, to the cattle. Dumolard's information had been accurate enough: scarcely half the animals had been shipped when Osalez took it into his head to be gone. But we were none the better off on that account—rather the reverse, indeed, in the event of a storm; for instead of being fast wedged, as otherwise they would have been, our loosely-secured live freight might break away from their lashings, when, as the mate remarked, there would be the devil to pay, and no mistake. Meanwhile they stamped and dragged at their halters, and filled the air with uneasy bellowings that might have seemed ominous of

coming disaster had one been much given to forebodings.

Under the bulwarks aft, rows of Africans had made themselves as snug as circumstances admitted of. There was a general effect of dark blue cloaks, picked out with white under-garments, of turbans and fezzes, and red and yellow slippers. For besides ordinary passengers we were freighted with a batch of pilgrims taken on contract. They were on their way to establish communication with a screw steamer chartered from Gibraltar for the Mecca voyage, and advertised to touch at the various African ports. While piled in barricades round the cabin skylights, were crates of poultry packed as closely as "the humans." Many of the cocks had apparently lost their heads already with the heat and stuffiness of their quarters. At all events they had entered on a mad crowing match at the moon, as if they had mistaken her watery ladyship for the blessed sun at day-dawn.

The captain civilly cleared a space for us between the paddle-boxes, and offered us the rim of the gangway overhead. As for Osalez, we had seen nothing of him since we came on board, and I at least for the moment had forgotten both him and his daughter.

A yo-heave-oh-ing rises from the steerage over the lowing of the oxen. The anchor comes up, the paddles go round, and the Mary Anne is mov-

ing. A clumsy tub she was ; immensely broad in the beam and round as an apple in the bottom, safe enough, in all conscience, so long as she had moderately fair play, but rolling frightfully to the slightest shock on her sides. So it may be imagined how we began to feel it, when at last we drew out from under shelter of the land. I hope Miss Osalez may have been happy below, though I doubt it. I only know that when I last looked down into the main cabin while we were still in the bay, the pipes had gone out, the jabber of voices had been silenced, and nothing was to be heard but groaning and gnashing of teeth ; while the decks were littered with a moaning mass of miserable humanity, damped occasionally by the flying showers of spray. But all that was comparative Elysium to what was to follow. Even out of the shelter there was no wind to speak of, yet the swell was singularly heavy, considering it came from the shore. Soon the decks were nearly as wet as the surrounding water. Wave after wave flooded us forward, each of them having scarcely time to wash out through the scuppers before it was followed by another and another. As for the pious hadjis, they were put through a course of involuntary ablution that should have relieved them from such ceremonial observances for the rest of their natural lives. Meanwhile the engines were doing their best, but they sobbed like a pair of broken-winded screws, who

have been pumping themselves with violent over-exertion. We made pitifully little way, and I felt it was matter for heartfelt congratulation that the gale should have so nearly blown itself out. If we were in difficulties when labouring through the afterwash of a storm, how should we have behaved had we been caught in its fury?

I was to have an opportunity of judging before morning. I had sunk into a troubled sleep with Roper's head bobbing against my shoulder, when a tremendous roll flung me forward on my hands in a rush of slimy briny water. Nothing like a cold douche of the kind to bring the slowest man quickly to his senses. I had staggered to my feet in a moment, instinctively looking out to the windward. The moon was brighter than ever overhead, in a sky that would have been clear but for the fleecy clouds that were drifting with ominous velocity; but when I had time to take the bearings, I saw the wind had gone right about. That thick grey curtain I started at, came travelling up from Tarifa, slanting uglily in the upper half of it, though as yet hanging heavily perpendicular below. Had I been innocent of what was awaiting us when the gale met the ground swell with the steamer for their plaything, a glance at the captain's face might have warned me. It did not show a sign of fear, but was eloquent with the sense of a terrible responsibility.

I had once been struck by a white squall off Candia, when we barely saved our bacon by the skin of our teeth ; but so far as a vivid recollection serves me, it was milder than what we experienced now. For myself I felt assured that it was all over with us ; no use attempting to float in such a sea, and the crazy boats would have been overcrowded and swamped, even had we ever succeeded in launching them safely. For a minute or two we were involved in a damp drifting curtain of darkness that might literally be felt, though it thinned and cleared fast as the gale tore it into tatters. It is true the sea did not run so very high, thanks to the conflict of opposing forces ; but the jumble and turmoil of the breaking water gave one a good idea of indifferent weather in the Maelstrom. The scene on the one deck and the other baffles description. I could command them both when I had scrambled up on the gangway. The half-drowned oxen were plunging wildly, filling the night with frantic bellowings—those of them at least that had not slipped down on their sides, to hang half-strangled in their halters. One or two had broken loose ; so had a couple of water-butts, and these last went rattling about like shot in a bottle, making confusion worse confounded. The deck passengers had gone in a rush for the cabin doors, where the leading files had wedged themselves hard and fast. The rest were vocifer-

ating and blaspheming for the most part, clutching desperately at each other's garments, or anything else they could make themselves fast to; while a few were on their knees and praying devoutly. A hadji on pilgrimage who goes to the bottom has his felicity assured if he has faith to believe it. The cross waves were making free with the decks, but as yet there was little danger of being carried overboard, although sundry of the cratefuls of poultry had gone cruising on their own account. The truth is, it was an awful moment for all of us—Christian or Jew, Mussulman or Pagan.

But the mate backed the captain manfully, and their coolness somewhat steadied the crew. With a couple of men at the wheel, they got the boat before the wind again, and on the whole I thought we were well out of it. For the squall blew over almost as fast as it had come up, leaving nothing worse behind than a fresh nor'-westerly breeze, and a sea that was seething in circles like a boiling kettle. At another time I should have been horribly sea-sick; as it was, I was very much too busy in helping to secure the frightened cattle.

All at once, the labouring engines came to a standstill. There was a startling cessation of the vibration of the planks beneath our feet. Struck powerless, the steamer fell away, rolling purposelessly in the trough of the waters. There was a

general rush amidships, for most of us guessed what had happened.

They say a sense of common calamity tames the wildest and reassures the shyest of animals, making them forget their antipathies for the time. The wolf and the sheep have been seen cowering together while being swept down a flood on the same raft of refuge. Roper and Osalez almost rush into each other's arms as they meet over the scuttle of the engine-room.

Roper had clearly kept his head, whoever else might have lost theirs. He was much more curious than excited, when Osalez burst out with, "For God's sake, Captain Roper, is there any danger?"

Roper had come to loathe Osalez, and at that moment he despised him. To bring his only child to sea in such weather, and then to give a thought to his own miserable safety. So he looked down on him for a moment in silence, and then shouted out, with blunt incivility, "Never fear for yourself, Mr Osalez. I believe we're safe enough unless the storm comes up again, and you may take my word for it, that there are some of us who were never born to be drowned."

Probably, in selfish prudence, he would have given much to recall the words the instant they were spoken. At any rate he would quickly have done it from a more generous motive. It was just because he had brought his young daughter on

board with him that Osalez had forgotten his enmity for a moment. Reminded of it so brusquely, his angry eastern blood flushed up to his sallow face; but mastering himself with a strong effort, he answered shortly, but not without dignity. Roper's face got as hot as the Jew's. He would have given the world to atone for that piece of injustice. There was no unsaying his speech, but impulsively he seized his enemy's hand with characteristic vehemence that excited not the slightest response.

"I never was so sorry for anything in my life, Mr Osalez——" but before he had got further Osalez had turned away with a chilling smile, and a "Forgive me, sir, if I leave you to reassure my daughter." He could scarcely have picked out words to revenge himself more effectually. Had Roper made a snatch at the olive branch when it was offered, he might have been permitted to share in the work of consolation.

"Just like my luck and temper," he sighed. "I'll never have such a chance again, and——it serves me right."

"Who knows?" I ejaculated oracularly, looking away from the pandemonium on deck upon the surrounding turmoil of waters.

The engines had broken down past mending, but there was no return of the storm; the hours slipped by sluggishly, sea-sickness and Oriental fatalism

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had generally got the upper hand again: most of us seemed resigned to endure stoically till time and the elements should drift us to some haven. I should have been tolerably contented myself, for simple squeamishness sits lightly on one after an escape from sudden death, had it not been for close observation of the skipper and his second in command. I saw them laying their heads together and whispering anxiously, and yet neither of them were men to "shake at shadows."

"Now that it's over, we're all right, captain, are we not?" I took an early opportunity of remarking cheerfully, as I went up to him where he stood on the gangway, peering eagerly out over the paddle-boxes.

His first answer was gruff enough and curt enough. But second thoughts succeeded, making him more civil and explanatory.

"God grant it, sir; but we may have our work cut out for us before breakfast-time, those of us that are men at least, for that lot of Jews and they riff-raff for Mecca are worse than the beasts that are bellowing below there." I looked inquiring, so he went on. "Ay, the wind's dropped, and it's as quiet as could be hoped for, and we might float for ever, if we had plenty of sea-room, and maybe we might rig up some duds of canvas that would serve well enough till we could get some kind of help."

"But, God bless me! man, we're in the Straits

of Gibraltar : they've only to get a sight of us and see that we are crippled, and they'll be racing after the salvage from Gibraltar and Algeiras. If you look to the money, of course——"

"I don't grudge the money, sir; and I'll be bound my owner there, well as he likes it, would cast his about as if it were dirty water if he knew all I could tell him at this moment."

"What is it, then? You may as well take me into the secret; it's my profession to risk my life, you know; and I don't happen to have a daughter on board."

"Well, then, it's just this. Where would you take us to be now? Somewhere in the course between the Rock and Tangiers?"

"Certainly. Where else?"

"Just so, and you would be sair mista'en. The worse luck ours. I haven't sailed the boat here, fair weather and foul, not to have made some small acquaintance with the currents. I know the set of them at least, if not their strength; the day'll be breaking on us in another hour at the most, and then——"

"Then?"

"Then I jalouse we'll be no that far from the Riff coast; and with the air this way and the steamer helpless, I don't see what's to save us from going ashore. So you'll have to stand by us, if need be, when the time comes; that's what

I wanted to say to you ; and now I must be stepping below to see after they bellowing beasts of cattle."

A pleasant hearing truly. I had heard something of currents and under-tows in the Straits. I had seen the sea running like a mill-race off the opposite point of Tarifa. And I had heard even more of the Riffs than the currents—the most savage and lawless tribe of the wild and warlike population of Morocco. Living almost under the guns of our great Mediterranean garrison, they were as reckless of life, and as much of pirates within the limit of their means, as any rovers who ever put out from Salee. Fiercely independent as they were of control, their emperor had very little to say to them. I had listened to stories of garrison yachts becalmed in that dangerous neighbourhood, whose owners, although not men to make parade of their piety or their fears, had expressed most heartfelt gratitude for hairbreadth escapes. A broken-down steamer would be the most tempting of prizes ; and here were we with the most helpless of freights, —our passengers sure to be panic-stricken or unmanageable at the very first appearance of danger. I saw how it would be, when I went to take Roper into my council, and I had fresh proof, too, of how ridiculously he had fallen in love. As brave a fellow as need be, in thinking of his Esther he lost courage altogether for the moment ; then im-

mediately he was a man again and something more, in the hope that the chance he had missed would come back to him. "We must save her somehow," was all he said; and, upon my word, I believe he thought no more of myself and the rest of us, than I did of the Mary Anne with her cattle.

One has witnessed the enthusiasm of an audience when the dull curtain flying upwards to the spring unveils some brilliant effect of the scene-painter. Passive actors in an agitating drama, the crew and passengers of the Mary Anne were in no mood to be enthusiastic about anything; yet I imagine there were few of them but must have been impressed in a way with the view that burst upon us with the breaking of the morning. We had been pitching and rolling in a dense watery vapour, which had been slowly thinning from black to grey as the doubtful light came filtering through it. Of a sudden we felt some fresh puffs of wind, and at the signal there was a vivid reddening overhead like the fierce reflection of a fire from behind a canopy of canvas. Then a round ball of flame burned out above the eastern horizon, and the veil that had wrapped us hitherto floated away as by enchantment. The glorious range of the Atlas seemed within arm's reach. Peak rose on peak, their rocky foreheads flashing out in rosy effulgence, although here and there one of the shaven scalps was swathed

in a white vapoury turban, while shreds of the veil that had been about us but the moment before were still elinging round the mountains' waists or to be seen streaming away over their shoulders. In the sweep of an amphitheatre, those mountains embraced a bay, that still lay with their spurs and their lower limbs in the coldest and deepest shadow; save here and there to the westward, where some solitary sun-shaft, shooting down through a crevice in the serrated crests, had fallen in a line of radiance on the strip of pearly beach. There was very little beach, by the by: whatever the glories of the scenery in the eye of the artist, it was as ugly a bit of coast from the mariner's point of view as you need care to look upon. Jagged rocks sinking almost to the water's edge; long rugged reefs running out here and there, uplifting their heads in the most unlooked-for places, their slimy, weed-covered backs seeming to rise and fall on the swell like so many hideous sea-monsters on the watch to swallow any castaways.

I knew not whether the noise of the swell breaking into surf, deadened though it had been by the distance, had given the captain preliminary warning of the imminent dangers awaiting us. I had not spoken to him for the last hour or so. All I know is, that so far as Roper and myself were concerned, that bit of surprise was dramatic enough in all conscience; and before we had well time to ex-

change an ejaculation, a common thrill had run round the ship, followed by wailing and shrieking almost as loud and wild as that we had listened to when the squall caught us in the night-time. It said more for the skipper's nerve than veracity that he bellowed, from his stand on the gangway, an assurance that we were in no manner of peril. His Scotch speech was Sanskrit to the most of the mob, and if any one had listened to him nobody would have believed him. Instinctively I swept the sea-board northwards, to see if there were assistance in sight. There was nothing visible but one faint dark line of smoke. Gladly should I have given all I possessed in the world could we have been transhipped on board that invisible steamer.

"For heaven's sake, Esther—Miss Osalez, I mean—don't alarm yourself!"

The voice was Roper's; and when I wheeled round upon him, there was his beautiful lady-love half reclining in his arms. Don't believe that the fair dove had flown thither instinctively, when she came fluttering up from the cabin at the sounds of lamentation on the deck. But a tall Berber, "scroodging" like every one else, had sent her spinning aside with a shove from his square shoulder-blade, and that lucky Roper had been on the spot to receive her, and now he stood steadying and soothing her a considerably longer time than was in any way necessary. Most ungratefully he cast one truculent

glance at the unconscious Mussulman who had acted as the rough go-between of love.

If Miss Osalez apparently found some consolation in having her ruffled plumage smoothed by that manly yet gentle hand, it would have been hard to blame her. The circumstances were excuse enough for abridging ceremony; and then she had known Jack so long as a devoted admirer, who had stooped from his higher position in society to make a fool of himself for her pretty face. There was assurance besides, as well as most delicious flattery, in seeing him not only cool but happy, when most people about him were in miserable panic. When the ground has been cleared beforehand, love-making naturally goes forward at a gallop in a supreme crisis of the kind; and to do him bare justice, Jack was the very man to profit by so fair an opportunity. Miss Osalez disengaged herself leisurely with a grateful smile and a murmur, which of course he had to stoop his head to hear. She let him support her to one of the benches aft, where he deposited her carefully out of the way of the general confusion. As for the father, he stuck by the pair, but made no objection. Jack's coolness had its influence on him too: apparently he began to regard the stalwart gunner as a life-buoy that it would be as well to keep within reach of the family—at all events, in the meantime.

For the more you looked at the situation the less

you liked it. Our close vicinity to the land showed how fast the vessel must have drifted ; and the set on the surface was still inshore, although it seemed as if some under-flow must be putting the drag on. It was a simple calculation however, that if nothing could be done in arrest of our fate, we should know the best and the worst of it in an hour or so.

All this passed of course far more quickly than I have written it. I was on the point of going in search of the captain, when he spared me the trouble by coming to accost me.

"A bad job, as I said, sir. I trust you and your friend will lend us a helping hand.

"You may count upon us, captain ; but what's become of your crew?"

"The crew, sir—a wheen feckless, mutinous idiots! No, no ; there's no a man we can reckon upon, forbye the mate and the engineer lad, who's a Yankee ; and maybe—ay, there's ane dependable hand in the forecastle—that's Davidson."

"It might be well to see to the boats in case of accidents, eh?"

"Accidents!—it'll be nothing but an accident if anything save us ; and that you had best lay your account wi'. Boats! od, the only boat I would trust to swim in siccan a sea as yon, got a boom through her bottom the time o' the squall, when the foresail was blown out o' the bolt-ropes. And as you may see yourself, all they Moorish and

Jewish scum are making a rush for them already: if they should get them into the water, they'll drown the sooner; but it's no worth disputing it with them, one way or another."

The skipper's speech had become more decidedly Scotch in his excitement, and I might have laughed at another time at his peculiar philanthropy; but now it was anything but a laughing matter. "What the deuce do you mean us to do, then? Is there no means of bringing us up with the anchor?"

"It's our best hope, but it might easily be better. I doubt the ground-tackle's some the worse for wear, though it did hold us in Tangiers' Bay yestreen, and it's bad mooring ground here; and then gin once the cable rub on they reefs, it would snap like a tow in the flame of a candle. We'll do our endeavour anyhow; and that's what brought me here to speak to you."

"I'll tell my friend what you say, and you may depend on us."

"Ay," said the captain, glancing over to where Roper was lounging about in contemplation of Esther Osalez. "It may be bad for us men, should we take our lives ashore with us; but it'll be worse, maybe, for some of the rest."

"Well, one good thing is, the coast seems quiet enough in the meantime—not a sign of life stirring anywhere."

"That's all you ken about it. Beg pardon, sir,

but I'll be bound now that they cliffs are swarming with the Riff deevils, if we could only see them. And it's like there will be ane o' those douars o' theirs, as they call their rickles of villages, up that bit of a gully. There's gey good pasturing about the nooks on the hillside, for all that it looks gruesome and barren. But I've no time for clavers, for here comes the mate, and it's like he's found the powther barrel: we may as well be signalling with the bit brass gun we've got—there's the reek of a steamer there, and, though she be to windward, maybe they might hear us. And, talking of powther, I wish you and Captain Roper would get up your arms and ammunition. You may have livelier sport than you missed at Tangiers before all's said and done."

The ancient piece of brazen ordnance made more noise than I should have fancied possible: the reverberation went rolling about among the rocks in the amphitheatre of mountains. Whether the people on the steamer heard it or not, it was very certain to give the alarm on the Riff coast. With that feeling strong upon me, I plunged below to look after the arms. Roper was after me the next instant. "I say, old fellow, I think everything's going as swimmin'ly as possible."

"The devil it is," was my unsympathetic rejoinder.

"Yes, I know it's hardly the time for philander-

ing; but isn't she a beauty, and such pluck. What do you mean taking the guns out of their cases, when everything's still dripping on the decks."

"We may want them before the day's an hour older—that's to say, if you don't intend that we shall be made peaceable prize of by these Riff savages."

A new light seemed to burst on Roper, and certainly I had no cause now to complain of his amorous distraction. He unpacked and overhauled our armoury and ammunition with a close and eager attention that augured indifferently for somebody, should the weapons be brought into play. A second salvo from the brass gun, and another rattle among the Atlas echoes, greeted our return on the deck, each of us loaded like Robinson Crusoe when he took the field against the cannibals. Esther Osalez gave a little scream, notwithstanding Jack's commendations of her courage. However, Jack threw out some private signal in return which seemed to reassure her, though we were very visibly drawing nearer to the shore. Now the sun was lighting everything down to the water's edge, and by this time the foreground had become unpleasantly animated. We were quite near enough to distinguish with the naked eye the dresses of the groups who were clustering at the mouth of the ravine the captain had remarked upon. And carrying the eye upwards and inland, I could see other individuals

scrambling down grooves in the rocks that might have been footpaths, but looked as if they had been worn by the rainfall. It was plain that these apparent solitudes were peopled by an eminently active population, indefatigably industrious in their particular avocation, and ready enough to help their providence when it sent them a god-send in the shape of a ship.

The stir that was going on ashore quickened the captain's movements, and impelled him to try our last chance of safety. Moreover, a stronger current had just laid hold of us, as we could tell by the increasing velocity of the foam-bubbles that went swirling past our sides.

"I doubt if the anchor'll grip yet; but it is best trying." The cable rattled through the hawse-hole as the anchor went over the side; we waited anxiously for the jerk that should have brought us up; but the sense of being swept smoothly onwards towards our fate was never lightened for a single moment. The captain shook his head ominously; the Yankee engineer's long face grew visibly longer, as he thrust his hands viciously to the very bottom of his trouser pockets. So we manned the capstan gloomily, and brought the anchor up again;—nothing, by the way, could be less reassuring than the fretted strands of the cable. And still the steamer was setting steadily for the shore. The warm sun was drying the limpid air till we could observe

the most minute details of the preparations made to receive us. The wild groups were gesticulating fiercely. Stalwart figures were flourishing lances, and fumbling over matchlocks of portentous length. What was more serious, it was not merely a question of patience with them—of waiting till the friendly currents should wash the waif to their feet. For more than one long boat had been dragged down from its berth in the sides of the ravine, and was bobbing about by this time in the waters of the little estuary. Masts were being stepped and yards hoisted. And, "Od, sirs, they'll lay us aboard in the twinkling of a bed-post if we don't find the means of fending them off!" ejaculated the captain.

But in the meantime a bustle on board distracted our attention. The sight of the threatening preparations on the land had changed the abject panic of our passengers into the frenzied courage of desperation. Better to chance it on the troubled straits than trust the tender mercies of the Riffs. There was a rush made on the only boat, two or three of the demoralised crew taking the lead; and somehow it was lowered without upsetting. The captain eased his conscience with a warning of its state, which went altogether unheeded. "Ye madmen! ye daft, doited idiots! I tell you she makes water like a bauchled boot; and she's bound to sink with you if you put over for the Spanish side." But, all the same, a ladder was let down, and a

human cascade of Hadjis and Jews and mongrel sailors began to precipitate itself over the side. The crazy tub floated comparatively comfortably under the steamer's lee. They managed to shove off before it was filled to the swamping point; and, selfishly speaking, we could easily spare them. Yet much of the company they left behind with us was even less desirable. There were the women and the children, the old and the feeble,—all harmless and helpless; but besides there was an ugly knot of sturdy Moslem fatalists. As no exertions of man can help him to elude his destiny, these had declined to scramble for accommodation in the boats. Besides, they might possibly think they had another chance. The miscreants ashore, although their hands were against most people, were, after all, of their own blood and faith. A judicious onset at the propitious moment might make them masters of the rest of us—infidel dogs, to be handed over as a peace-offering to our enemies.

“It's likely, no doubt, that may be their notion,” responded the captain, when I suggested the idea. “And we'll do wisely to hold together when we go about our work, and keep an eye on each other and on them in case of accidents.”

The weapons we could muster were distributed, so that five out of the half-dozen of an effective force were formidably armed. Roper and myself had handy breech-loading carbines, the very thing

for the circumstances, warranted deadly up to 300 yards, with revolvers into the bargain. The captain and his mate had our No. 12 central fires, loaded with B.B. cartridges, that would scatter like case-shot at short ranges. The Yankee engineer, backwoods'-bred, had taken kindly to a ponderous ducking-gun. Mr Davidson, able seaman, had to content himself with the rusty fowling-piece belonging to the vessel, and a pike which he contrived to improvise for the occasion.

While making our preparations, the Moslems watched us gloomily, huddling themselves together, draping themselves in their mantles, and fumbling beneath these, possibly at daggers, as if by way of counter-demonstration. Aft on the quarter-deck the Osalez had kept themselves very much to themselves. Certainly their isolation was by no particular wish of the young lady's, and indeed she seemed to gain something more than courage from the affectionate looks her lover threw at her. She actually appeared to enjoy the excitement, and at all events had brightened up amazingly with the beautiful morning. She had let a great burnous slip back on her pretty shoulders, and coquettishly adjusted her brilliant neck-ribbon. Positively, I saw her slip off her hat when Roper's back was turned, and, producing a tiny brush and comb from somewhere in her raiment, proceed to smooth those magnificent tresses of hers. It was certain she did

not realise the worst terrors of her situation, or her eyes and cheeks would scarcely have been so lustrous.

Her father did. Evidently he was exceedingly sorry for himself, and, perhaps, to do him justice, still more anxious for her. Knocking about the straits and the African coast in the way of his very promiscuous business, he could scarcely have been altogether unaccustomed to danger. But this time the danger was far graver than usual, and then, as a careful man of business, he might be irritated at having rushed into it wantonly. *Que diable* were he and his daughter doing on board of that unlucky *galère* at all?—at any rate, why had they insisted on sailing so soon, instead of waiting for more favourable weather? Why indeed? All because of that bull-headed Englishman, who, after persecuting them with his attentions in Gibraltar, would come blundering up against them in Tangiers, suggesting ideas of abductions and elopements. He blamed poor Roper for his own folly, and in fact was frank enough to blurt out as much, trusting, it may be assumed, to the impunity insured him by that idol-worship of Jack's which offended him. Were my life prolonged for a century I should never forget the figure he cut. He had got himself up against the night chills in a rough fur cap, a shaggy poncho, and a pair of ponderous riding-boots. Slung on one shoulder was a leathern bag, whose contents might

possibly be inestimably precious. Swinging to the other was a bell-mouthed blunderbuss of his own, a most formidable weapon at close quarters. He paced round the spot where his daughter was seated with the methodical tread of a sentinel on duty, but with the sullen ferocity of a wolf or hyæna exercising itself behind the bars of its cage. Every now and then he would stop to pull his daughter's wrapper more closely round her, giving her a savage pat of affection and encouragement. Then he would mutter, and make a dash out along the decks, probably bringing up alongside of Roper, who appeared to fascinate him with an odd attraction of repulsion. As the Moors on shore got more forward with their preparations he had grown more excited, until he began almost to rave.

"You've been persecuting us on the Rock for these months past, and what demon brought you after us to Tangiers, Captain Roper? Should I ever get back again in safety to my home——"

He looked the Shylock all over as he left the menace unspoken. Jack on his side burst out this time, but it was neither the unreasonable charge nor the implied threat he took fire at.

"What fiend prompted you, you miserable man, to bring your daughter into such fearful peril, for your blind, idiotical fancies? As if I had ever dreamed you were in Tangiers till that accursed hour when you ran into my arms."

The indignation in his eyes was the more terrible in a man habitually so calm and good-tempered. Osalez was overmastered and perhaps conscience-stricken. At all events he said nothing, though he stood his ground, till Jack, who remembered himself, made a mighty effort over his temper, and extended his hand.

"Forgive me, Mr Osalez, and set my speech off against yours. We have each of us grievances, it seems; and if I have done anything to make your life uncomfortable, again I frankly entreat your pardon. Surely when we are meeting a common danger, and know not what the next hour may bring to us, we can afford to forget our anger, and let bygones be bygones."

Osalez hesitated. His daughter had sprung up and drawn near to them at the first mutterings of the storm; her face was flushing with gratitude to the strong and stately Englishman for his forbearance; but, like a sensible girl, she resisted her impulse to interpose. That would have been enough to harden the heart of her stiff-necked parent. It was the skipper who volunteered for peacemaker.

"Ay, ay, Mr Osalez, let bygones be bygones, as the captain says. Shake hands, and let us all stand shoulder to shoulder, or else they misbegotten devils 'll be letting us have our kale through the reek long ere dinner-time. Take my word for it."

Sullenly acknowledging the cogency of the argument, though he only half understood it, the Hebrew touched the proffered hand.

"And now," resumed the captain, "we may as well clear the steamer forward, by heaving some of the brutes of cattle overboard; and when that's done, we'll have another trial with the anchor. They're but sorrow and trouble to us here, the cattle; but they may possibly divert the notice of our friends on shore there."

"The cattle belong to me," interposed Osalez; "and they're just as well where they are in the meantime. One never knows what may happen."

"But it's me that's answerable for the ship and the souls on board of her. You need not bend your brows that fashion, Mr Osalez; it's long odds against both of us being spared for the one to send the other to the right about."

"But it's no question of life, man—not for me at least," said Osalez, hurriedly, as if appealing to the captain against the doom he dreaded. "The Moors will know me: there are those on board who will tell them; though heaven knows what they may wring out of me for ransom."

The captain gave his shoulders a shrug worthy of Dumolard. I couldn't help whispering to Roper, "A beautifully unselfish character, your father-in-law;" but I don't believe he heard me. His face was speaking comfort and sympathy to Esther, who

was blushing and paling for her father, till she looked more bewitching than ever.

It was no very difficult matter getting rid of the cattle—only withdrawing a board and driving them overboard; soon they were to be seen striking out for the shore in all directions. And, as the captain had shrewdly surmised, the Riffs got ready to welcome them.

While our stray stock were being roped and penned ashore, we had once more let go the anchor. Indeed it was high time to make our last effort. There were reefs immediately ahead of us both to port and starboard; and judging by the whiter patches of broken water, we might strike on a submerged rock at any moment. Anxiously we watched again after the splash; again the anchor was dragging, and the steamer moving as before. Again we had gone despondently to the capstan-bar, when a jerk responded to the strain. The anchor had bit, and held firmly.

The sense of relief was great, but it did not last. The reprieve seemed likely to be very temporary.

“We’ll have time to look about us now, eh, captain?” exclaimed Osalez, shooting buoyantly to the surface from the depths of his despondency.

The captain showed no corresponding exhilaration. “We might possibly have had the time and a chance, had you but fitted us with the new cable I begged of you the day before we left the Rock.

As it is, I'm thinking the few sovereigns you kept in your purse may cost you mair cash than you'll like to think of, and many a man his life forbye."

Whereupon Osalez made a clutch at the cap that covered his hair, and literally wept tears of rage and regret over that luckless piece of ill-timed economy. It was the captain's theory that the anchor had caught hold of a ledge of rock; that the cable at this moment must be fretting on the sharp stone edge. "And I'll take my solemn 'davy there isn't a sound strand in it; 'deed more than one of them were snappit already, as you saw and found for yourselves."

"The Riffs, at any rate, are not in the secret of the quality of your ground-tackle," exclaimed Roper, after a time. "See! the beggars are getting impatient, and mean to come off to us, as we won't go ashore to them."

It was even so. A couple of boats were being loaded down to the gunwales with people, and both parties bristled with matchlock-barrels and spear-heads. Sweeps were got out and manned by great muscular barbarians. They would be aboard of us in no time, if we made no objections. We looked blank, certainly, but I think determined. We had been preparing ourselves for this for some time; and then nothing is more wearying or worrying than suspense. Just then the mate, who stuck to his special charge like a man, and had been let-

ting off his brass cannon at irregular intervals, walked up to it to fire another shot. The usual reverberations had risen and died away—hark! could that be an echo of them from the Spanish side? Latterly we had been too much occupied nearer home to keep a very lively look-out to seaward; but now we made a simultaneous rush to various vantage-points. Lightest and most agile of all, Esther had anticipated the rest of us.

“The steamer! the steamer! the steamer!” she screamed in a melodious falsetto, letting her opera-glass rattle down upon the deck, clapping her little hands, jumping in joyous excitement on the cabin-hatch where she had perched herself.

“A gunboat either from Gibraltar or Algeiras,” pronounced the captain, after a long, steady look through his telescope.

“The Groper, for a thousand! Calverley’s surveying ship. She’s always poking about the straits in all weathers.” Such was the suggestion of Roper, and he was notorious for excellent eyes.

But Groper or not, she was yet a great way off, and it was hard to tell for the tumbling waves whether she were actually heading down for us. However, we hoped the best, and soon had reason to believe it. If that was her gun, it must have been in response to our signal; so we repeated it, and were distinctly answered this time.

Osalez having thrown himself down on his knees, jumped up to fling himself into his daughter's arms. Roper looked as if he would have liked to follow suit; but he had already taken advantage of the parent's paroxysm of devotion to press her hands in his and do everything short of embracing her. It was the cool and collected skipper who reminded us that our rejoicings were premature.

"It's a race after all, remember, between friends and foes. There's no doubt of it that the Riffs have sighted that boat long before we did, and that's the reason they're so set upon coming aboard here. They're dour deevils to deal with in any case; and they'll be harder to beat off than ever, now that they see us like to slip through their fingers."

"If it's a race, there can be no question who is making the running. I should say they must be pretty near the 400 hundred yards by this time, eh, Jack?"

Roper nodded assent, glanced round at his lady-love to see that she was admiring his adroitness, sighted his carbine to its longest range, and pitched it up to his shoulder. He "browned" the boatful, no doubt; still, allowing for the pitching of one craft and the other, it was a pretty as well as a lucky shot. The boat yawed visibly and shipped a wave. One of the rascals pulling had dropped his oar as if the handle had burned him. But all the same,

on they came again ; the master of the engines tried his long piece with no results ; and a couple of shots of my own had expended themselves on the air or the water. Our enemies regained their confidence, and while one of the boats deliberately slackened speed, the other went off upon a detour to approach us from a different quarter. We kept loading and firing again, but thanks probably to the double motion, our practice left a good deal to desire.

“This will never do,” said the captain, very sensibly. “It’s no time for practising at long ranges. We had best get down behind the bulwarks, let them draw nearer, and bide our time.”

Roper and Osalez, acting as allies for once, forced Esther to lie down on her rug. She utterly refused to go below decks. Then they subsided like the rest of us, and we all waited. We could catch the splash of the sweeps in spite of the sound of the breakers. The captain raised his head over the bulwarks, and drew a scattering fire of musket-balls which did him no harm whatever. “Now then, all of you together, and take it steady, for God’s sake !” This time the warning we gave them was unmistakable. A couple of individuals who chanced to be on their legs pitched head-foremost into the water, where they splashed about like wounded wild-fowl. One or two more dropped among the

ballast of the boat. While the Riffs were occupied picking up their crippled comrades, the battery of breech-loaders was charged again. Another round, more casualties, and the confusion became more confounded. Leaving their friends to their fate, they turned this time and headed for the beach, like Cleopatra's galleys flying from the fight at Actium.

The cheer that followed them in their retreat was cut short by a shriek. It appeared that Miss Osalez's feminine curiosity had tempted her to take an observation on the other side; and the sight that greeted her was the second boat far nearer than we should have fancied. It had fetched a compass, caught both the breeze and the current, and with hoisted sail was slipping swiftly down upon us. But what made the scream finish more shrilly than it began, was the proceedings of the handful of Mussulmans on board. Naturally anxious to cut short the exchange of shots, they thought the moment was come to interfere with decision. The leader of them, the man who had jostled Miss Osalez the night before, had shuffled out of his slippers and was gliding towards Roper with uplifted knife. Roper, all unconscious, was in the act of delicately adjusting one of the Moslem's co-religionists, when Esther's cry of warning brought him to his legs as if he had been galvanised. Changing his hands from the stock of his carbine

to the muzzle, with the quickness of thought he anticipated his assailant by knocking him senseless—"A most salutary warning for the rest of the blackguards," as the captain observed. And meantime Osalez had placed the contents of his blunderbuss at the disposal of the second boat's crew. It was a long range for the weapon, but by luck or skill he shot plump centre; though the charge did no serious damage, yet, thanks to the distance, it was so impartially distributed as to make the party stop short on their oars, and then promptly follow their fellows.

"Hurrah, my lads! here's the steamer coming!" exclaimed the captain in exceeding glee; and, indeed, it soon began to look like it. The hull was just rising out of the waters, and all hands agreed she was no other than the Groper. "Hurrah!" echoed Roper; "we'll get Calverley to spare us a couple of boats' crews and go and smoke the hornets out of their nest."

There's many a slip between the cup and the lip. The vessel gave a lurch that somehow sent Roper almost into Esther's arms, and the lurch was followed by a marked increase in our motion.

"The Lord help us!" exclaimed the captain, "it's the tow that's parted. You've done it this time, as I said, Mr Osalez; what would you offer now, would you have let me bend on the rope you refused?"

I believe most of us felt moved to cast the Hebrew overboard, but his fresh paroxysm of anguish and self-indignation might have disarmed us. It was only the tough texture of his garments that prevented his rending them; and failing that, he leaped up on a bench under the bulwarks, and began wildly gesticulating toward the distant steamer. Another roll — his feet go from under him, and he vanishes bodily from our sight. I rushed forward to see the fur cap disappearing down the vortex of a small whirlpool; what hope was there of his being saved, with that voluminous poncho clinging to him?

Esther, I must say, looked sublimely beautiful, as she tore her cloak from her throat as if she were preparing to follow her father. She turned like a fury on the captain, who had laid hold of her promptly with great presence of mind; and slight as she was, she must have tasked his strength to hold without hurting her, had not an incident come to divert her excitement. The moment Osalez had tilted over, Roper had begun to strip. In a second or two he had parted with coat, boots, and braces. He, too, had taken a flying observation over the side, and had marked Osalez disappear under the counter of the vessel. The next moment he had bounded across the deck, taken a neat header from the other side, dived, and disappeared also. I knew he was as strong in aquatics as at most other manly

pursuits, but I own I grew intensely anxious as the seconds went by and he never showed again. Ten to one his header might have brought him to grief upon a rock, and who could answer for the strength of the under-currents? As for Esther, she dragged the captain to the other side by strength of will rather than of body, and, seemingly unconscious of the man who held her, gazed wildly down into the seething water. In vain—there was no penetrating for an inch below these swirling circles; death might be grappling your dearest within a fathom of you, but at best you could only imagine the agony.

“Hold up, old fellow!” I shouted, as if he could hear me, and as if my shouting would help him, for I had seen the fair locks floating in the water beside the grizzled bullet-head of Osalez. A life-buoy, dexterously pitched, went skimming up to his very cheek, and the next moment Roper’s arm was through it, and he was drifting a-head in comparative safety. A rope went after the buoy, and at last we hauled the couple on board. Osalez was utterly insensible when we laid him down, and for a moment we believed it was all over. But his daughter, when her first agitation was passed, showed herself the best physician of any of us. She ordered us about, telling us what to do, and directed the application of different stimulants from such scanty means as we had at our disposal. At

length the chest heaved, the eyelids trembled, and the languid blood began to stir in the veins, till we could perceive a faint flutter in the pulse. Then, and when she was assured that life had revived, she raised herself to thank his preserver. But Jack neither gave her time to speak nor said one word himself. He merely looked, and opened his arms, and, all dripping as he was, she flew straight into them, resigned herself to his eager embrace, and buried her face in his bosom.

"And why the devil shouldn't she? I would wish to ask you," exclaimed the captain, looking round savagely, as if any one had impeached her delicacy; though to tell the truth, in the tension of our nerves we all regarded the impulse as perfectly natural.

The yarn has run already to an unconscionable length, and it boots not to dwell on the fag-end of it. Broken loose from her moorings, our steamer still set for the shore, and the Riffs took heart to have another try for us. Again they had to beat a bloody and ignominious retreat, encouraged as we were by the swift approach of the Groper. Her Majesty's vessel took the Mary Anne in tow, and the tardy voyage which might have been disagreeable at another time, seemed delightful after our recent experiences. Roper, in high good-humour, did not press Captain Calverley for boat-

crews for a descent. By nightfall we were landed on the quays of Gibraltar, by special permission from the Governor. Osalez, enveloped in blankets, was under way for his residence, and, thanks to my preoccupations and the doubtful light, I can say nothing of Jack's leave-taking of his mistress. But, three months later, I had the pleasure of assisting at the quietest of weddings, when Esther Osalez, only daughter and heiress of the late Abraham Osalez of Trafalgar Cottage, Gibraltar, was married to John Augustus Roper, Captain in H.M.'s Royal Regiment of Artillery. What is more, I had been requested to give away the bride; for the lamented Abraham had died of the fever contracted on the eventful night when his ill-found steamer was wrecked off the Riff coast. I may add that, before breathing his last, he gave his child his blessing, with absolute *carte blanche* to marry the man who might please her fancy; surmising doubtless, with his customary shrewdness, the quarter in which her choice would fall. As for religious objections, Osalez, as it may be imagined, had never been a bigot, having kept a deal of Christian company in his time; while his daughter found Jack the most eloquent of controversialists, and changed her creed before her marriage.

For the rest of the *dramatis personæ*, the mercantile influence Jack had won in wedlock found ex-

cellent berths for the worthy skipper as well as the mate and the Yankee engineer. The boat-load of passengers, who had vanished from our sight and thought, had perhaps as much luck as they deserved. Driven ashore in the bay, they were duly stripped, but dismissed as scarcely worth the slaughtering.

DOLLIE, AND THE TWO SMITHS.

[MAGA. JULY 1870.]

MY father was an Irishman and a writer of articles for magazines. I have never written in a magazine or anything else myself. My mother I don't remember. She died shortly after my birth. One of my earliest arithmetical efforts consisted in the discovery that I had nine brothers and sisters, concerning whom, as they are all alive and are some of them Fenians, I desire to speak only in complimentary terms.

I believe publishers did not pay so liberally in those days as I have reason to hope they do now, or possibly my father may have acquired dissolute habits through his contact with literary men; but from some cause or other I was so slenderly provided with food, clothing, and education, and my home was so inconveniently crowded and uncomfortable, that I left it at the age of fifteen with an outfit consisting of one extra shirt, one ditto pair of socks, a comb, and thirteen-and-sixpence that I borrowed, without alluding to it at the time, from

my eldest sister, who was keeping house and acted as treasurer generally, and whose balance in hand consisted of that amount. I have since paid it her back, with interest at 7 per cent. As, however, my present purpose in writing is not to dwell upon the varied and striking incidents in my own fortunes through life, so much as to portray certain scenes into which its destiny has led me, I will skip over the first twenty years after leaving home, and land myself in a neat white clapboarded house, with green venetians, and a veranda half round it, situated on a wooded hillside, and commanding a lovely view of a secluded lake about ten miles long and three wide, on the shores of which a few scattered clearings indicate that we are across the Atlantic, and in a part of the country not yet very thickly settled. Nevertheless, we are in one of the eastern States of America, at no very great distance from a city of fifty thousand inhabitants, and can hear the shriek of the engine as the cars stop at the little village at the head of the lake. As to whether that lovely creature with fair hair and blue eyes, and hands so small and white that it is a marvel how she can do so much house-work and preserve them as she does, and a pleasure to look forward to eating the bread they are now kneading,—I say, as to whether this young lady is my wife, or the "chattel," to take the legal English view of her, of that handsome broad-

shouldered man unyoking a team at the door of the barn, is a matter in which we three alone are concerned. It does not signify, either, who the farm or the two little chubby children belong to: the point to which I wish to call my readers' attention is this: Here I am, an Irishman by descent, an Englishman by birth, a citizen of the United States by naturalisation, and of the world by an extended knowledge of it. I confess to only one inveterate prejudice, acquired doubtless from a long residence among pure and simple Asiatics, and this is an intense abomination of, and contempt for, all society calling itself civilised, and especially for that mongrel race of money-grubbers, whether they are located on one side of the Atlantic or the other, which calls itself Anglo-Saxon, and which, to an inordinate conceit, adds an almost inspired faculty for "peddling." If, therefore, the extremely sensitive feelings of my American readers are hurt by this record of my experiences of village life in their country, I only request them to wait until I publish a few observations upon which I am engaged in regard to the commercial morality of London as compared with that of New York, when they will have an opportunity of judging for themselves of my extreme impartiality, and of venting their spleen against England, by republishing my very original and uncomplimentary criticisms on that country,

and pocketing the entire proceeds of the labour of my brains. I give them fair notice that for every dollar of which I am thus robbed I shall stick a pin into them somewhere; and people with such very thin skins had better make friends with me in time. I am to be bought. I have not purchased and paid for so many of my fellow-citizens without knowing to a cent what my own price is. My stock-in-trade consists of a certain faculty I have for washing the dirty ("soiled" we call it on this side—"dirty" is considered coarse) linen of the Anglo-Saxon race in public. So much as regards myself.

The name of my broad-shouldered companion and fellow-labourer is Orange Z. Smith. As there are two other Orange Smiths in the neighbourhood, we have to be very particular about the Z, pronounced zee, and not zed, in America, and so taught throughout the schools and colleges of the country. In the case of Orange, it does not stand for the first letter of any name, but is simply a distinctive middle initial; hence it follows that he is popularly known as Orange Zee. When our first little cherub was born, we called him Zuyder Zee, out of compliment to a Dutch ancestor on his mother's side. I may here remark that my name is also Smith. I dropped my Celtic patronymic and appropriated the English one upon the occasion of my taking the thirteen-and-sixpence from my sister above mentioned. The name of Zuyder Zee's mother is Mary, but she is

called "Dollie." All the pet diminutives of female names in the States end in *ie*, and not in *y* as in England, perhaps because there is a more refined flavour about *ie* than about *y*; and all Dollie's correspondents address their letters to her, not by the Christian name of her husband, or even by her own Christian name, but tenderly and affectionately as "Mrs Dollie Van Snook Smith," thus as it were inviting the affectionate sympathy and interest of the clerks in the post-office. So when I was so unfortunate the other day as to upset her out of the buggy and she broke her leg, the editor of the 'Van Snookville Democrat' touchingly alluded to "the limb of Mrs Dollie Smith, one of the most beautiful and highly respected residents of this township." Dollie's grandfather, Van Snook, had been the first settler here, and the town was called after him. When Zuyder Zee was born I asked Orange Zee whether the event ought not to be announced in the 'Van Snookville Democrat,' but he said it would not be considered proper to make any public allusion to the incident; and I remembered afterwards that I never saw a column for births in any American newspaper. Long may it be before our Dollie figures in any other column! but whenever she does, her affectionate relations will stick to the pet diminutive, and will announce the departure, not "of Mary, wife of —— Smith," but of "Mrs Dollie Van Snook Smith."

It is not necessary to say how Orange Zee and I first became acquaintances and then friends, and then decided "to go to farming" together, and were attracted to this pretty hillside, and to the immediate neighbourhood of the farm where Dollie was living with her parents. I had to trust to Orange Zee's farming experience in everything. My ignorance was so great that he never ceased wondering where I had been "raised." I should like to know how many of my readers know how to drive a nail so as not to split the wood. I think the profound contempt with which Orange Zee regards all Englishmen, to whom he owes his origin, is principally based upon the information which I gave him that there were actually many people in England who did not know how to drive a nail. Nor does he yet understand—as of course everybody must be constantly wanting to drive nails in England as in America—"what on earth they do, if they don't know how."

After Orange Zee and I had seen Dollie, and found that the adjoining farm was for sale, we determined to buy it; and we accordingly went to Dollie's uncle, to whom it belonged, and told him that the fences were all out of repair and the house was falling to pieces, and the meadows were all "run out," and that it was a miserable old place "any way," and not worth taking at a gift. Dollie's uncle saw at once from this that we were dying

to get hold of the place, and, as he was equally anxious to sell, he said that he had now given up all idea of selling, and intended to "hang on" to it. Orange Zee told me afterwards that the great art of buying and selling was to appear as if you did not want to buy or sell, and always to seem to hang back. So we hung back. As we were boarding with Dollie's parents, I found "hanging back" quite a pleasant occupation. At last one day Dollie's uncle came and said that he had been offered 75 dollars an acre for his farm, and that if we wanted it we had better speak, as he was going to let it go at that. To my surprise, Orange Zee said he had just offered 50 dollars an acre for a better farm on the other side of the lake, and expected to get a decided answer from the proprietor to-morrow. I felt quite angry with Orange Zee when I heard this, as I hated the looks of the other side of the lake; and when Dollie's uncle went away, I told him he might go there if he liked by himself, but that I should continue to "hang back." He laughed at my innocence, and assured me that what he had told Dollie's uncle was only as big a lie as what Dollie's uncle had told him, and "how else could we expect ever to get hold of the farm?" So then, of course, I said that it was all right, and we went on "hanging back." Finally, we had a talk with Dollie's father on the subject; and he said that if we would give him a hundred

dollars down, and a note of hand at six months for a hundred more in case he succeeded, he would get the farm from his brother at 50 dollars the acre; but in that case we must leave the place for the present and seem to have given up all idea of settling here. Orange Zee told me afterwards that the old man (we always called Dollie's father "the old man") had held a mortgage over his brother, and by threats of foreclosure forced him to sell. The old man was highly respected and looked up to for many miles round, as being the best horse-doctor and the "smartest" man at a trade generally to be found in that part of the country. He was also an elder of the Baptist Church, and exercised a most powerful gift on the occasion of "revivals" and "protracted meetings." When he found out how matters stood between Dollie, Orange Zee, and myself, he got nearly all our money out of us by secret promises of Dollie—first to one, and then to the other; and nothing but the accident of Dollie herself taking a decided stand of her own, prevented our being turned out of the house Dollieless and penniless. The whole details of this financially romantic transaction were afterwards reported in the 'Van Snookville Democrat;' and the old man received a sort of ovation for some time afterwards whenever he entered a store in the village, in compliment to his skill in having thus turned the charms of his Dollie to such good pecuniary account.

This did not prevent our having a wedding, which was the occasion of great rejoicing amongst all the members of the church to which Dollie belonged, and which bore grateful testimony to her popularity among the farmers' daughters in the neighbourhood, who flocked to her marriage, in very elaborate Parisian toilets, in buggies and spring-waggons, and accompanied by "beaux" the honesty of whose intentions it was refreshing, to one accustomed to less primitive conditions, to contemplate. If I decline, for reasons which may hereafter appear, to say whether Dollie was married to Orange Zee or myself on this auspicious occasion, it is not because either Dollie or her husband have ever since done anything to be ashamed of. Of the purity and simple innocence of our *ménage* there has never been a question. Nor did the fact that one of us had failed to realise his aspirations in respect of this estimable young lady, embitter our home relations. The sceptics in virtue on the other side of the Atlantic may sneer, but I am proud to say that no cloud of jealousy ever disturbed the serenity of our domestic horizon. Nor was the disappointed Smith ever for one instant false to the pure and innocent sentiment of fraternal affection which bound him to the other two. Indeed I may say that we were (and I trust still are) all three very justly considered models of propriety by the highly moral community of the village.

The said village consists of a single street, with three churches and a schoolhouse, all facing each other, in a little square in the middle, with pugnacious-looking steeples and a hostile cock to the gables, as though they were all longing to fly at each other. There are three dry-goods stores, and a hardware store, and a drug-store, and a blacksmith's shop, and a billiard saloon, and two taverns, besides grist-mills, saw-mills, carpenters' shops, &c. The population is a genial, good-natured race enough. Everybody is familiarly known by his or her abbreviated Christian name; and the most minute details of the daily life of every family, and every obscure member of it, are accurately known and carefully discussed at post-time in the store that keeps the post-office, and which serves as a club and resort for idlers generally throughout the day. For although the inhabitants of Van Snookville are a tolerably industrious and prosperous community, they manage to spend a large share of their time in gossip, and find in the ever-varying excitements of politics and religion abundant occasion for quarrel and intrigue. To one not familiar with their habits, their severe language and the harsh judgments they entertain of each other might be supposed to lead to irreconcilable feuds. But this is rarely the case, for the simple reason that an irreconcilable feud is a very unprofitable investment of time and temper; and men seldom hate

each other so much as to interfere with their prospects of being able to cheat one another. Of course the more rich and influential a man is, the more he can afford himself the luxury of a temper. In America, as in England, civility is a marketable commodity; and I had frequent occasion to remark with admiration that my Van Snookville friends rarely permitted their warmth or indignation of feeling to interfere with their prospective pecuniary interests.

Orange Zee said that, until we could increase our capital, our best chance of becoming respected in the village would be to join the Methodist Church, and get the better of the old man "on a trade." He has therefore already become a "class leader;" and in consequence of certain secret information regarding her father, conveyed to us by Dollie, we see a way by which we shall be enabled to obtain possession of a good deal of the old man's property, without rendering ourselves liable to imprisonment. We are indebted for the idea to Swomp, the pettifogging lawyer, who is the old man's rival in politics and in piety, and who is to obtain a percentage on the whole amount resulting from the transaction. After we had obtained possession of the farm and of Dollie, we found that it would be necessary to improve our living accommodation; and instead of building, we determined to buy a ready-made house which was for sale half a mile distant, and move

it to our own land—a proceeding which involved a great deal of the process known as “dickering.” To “dicker” successfully, one must have a great aptitude for chewing straws and whittling. The great art is to force your opponent to be the first to put a value on the article to be bought or sold. You choose a morning when you are not busy, for it is ruinous to let any indication of anxiety or haste appear. You walk slowly with your opponent to a fence-rail, and both sit leisurely across it, and chew straws thoughtfully. I say opponent, because in one sense every man is your natural enemy—all the members of the community, whether they are engaged in agriculture, commerce, or politics, being trained from their earliest infancy to prey upon each other’s pockets. You find yourself engaged in a gigantic game of grab (which means getting all you can, and giving as little as possible in return), and the weakest goes to the wall. Some win the game as bullies, others as sneaks; but you have very little chance unless you are either the one or the other. Moreover, it is important to remember that if you do not treat every man with whom you have any dealings upon the assumption that he is both a liar and a rogue, he considers you a fool; nor is there the least danger of his feelings being wounded by your openly doubting and requiring proof of his most solemn asseverations. This entire absence on your part of any gentlemanlike feeling

excites his respect for your "smartness," and leads him to doubt equally every statement made by you in return, as the highest compliment he can pay you. I remember my first attempt at a trade was made in Dollie's presence, and what I imagined were feelings of delicacy, she called weakness, and my sense of honour she said was *non* sense,—a fossil sentiment which had its origin in ages fitly called "dark," when idiots in armour devoted themselves to the protection of weak-minded women when they might have been making money, and sacrificed their material progress to an abstraction called Chivalry. I explained to Dollie that among the Anglo-Saxons on the other side of the Atlantic it was only considered honourable to tell lies when they were necessary to screen the woman you had betrayed; and that, according to modern ideas of chivalry, it was not considered important that you should respect the virtue of your friend's wife, if you religiously paid him your gambling debts. Nor could I get this obtuse Dollie to admit that the unscrupulous pursuit of dollars by men of business in the New World, was a more degrading occupation than the unlicensed pursuit of women by men of pleasure in the Old.

Orange Zee, who has an immense *physique*, trusts a good deal to his overbearing voice and manner in a trade; and it was amusing to hear him endeavour, by sheer force of will, to extort

from little Deacon Brown a price for his house, and to see the little Deacon wriggle, and writhe, and protest that he had not the faintest idea of how much it might be worth, that he had never sold a house in his life before, and that unless Orange Zee would make him an offer, he felt quite powerless and paralysed. At least two hours elapsed before either of them would name a figure. I think it was Orange Zee who, in spite of his browbeating, was forced to name a sum, which so wounded the Deacon's feelings, that he quietly rose and walked off without vouchsafing a word in reply, leaving our big Orange Zee ignominiously chewing his straw. In this game the little Deacon made the first score. It was protracted over many days with varying fortunes, and might finally be considered drawn, as I do not think we paid either too much or too little for the house.

The next thing was to dicker with the "house-mover" to transfer our new residence bodily on to our farm, which he did for a hundred dollars, with the assistance of an old broken-winded horse, a man, and a boy. The *modus operandi* is simple enough. You go into the woods and cut down two trees long enough to pass under the whole length of the building, which is of course of wood. By means of screws the house is raised from its under-pinning and placed upon these timbers,

which are in their turn placed upon wheels; the old horse walks round and works a sort of capstan fixed in the middle of the road, and attached by a rope to the house, which moves upon the wheels along planks placed under them as it slowly progresses. Most farmers in America are carpenters as well, and build their own houses without any assistance; but we were in a hurry, and Orange Zee had too great a contempt for my powers as an assistant for us to undertake it.

The most expensive operation was the purchase of stock. Twenty-five cows, at from 60 to 80 dollars apiece, made a considerable inroad into what the old man had left of our capital.

Orange Zee and I work our whole farm of 100 acres without any help. We have a team for which we paid 300 dollars, and a lumber-waggon and a mowing-machine, with ploughs, harrows, and other farm-implements. Dollie has a German "help" called "Lizer," who is not considered worth more than her board until she can speak English. We are consoled for her stupidity by her cheapness. She and Dollie milk all the cows, make all the butter, wash all the clothes, bake all the bread, cook all the food, and mend and make a great part of our clothing, to say nothing of looking after the children and the house generally.

We have a parlour with some ornaments made with dried "fall" leaves, and some cheap china

shepherds and shepherdesses, and a picture worked by Dollie's mamma in worsted-work. This room is kept carefully closed, and its finery covered up, excepting on the monthly occasions when Orange Zee, in his capacity of class leader, has a prayer-meeting in it. We live in the kitchen, out of which open two bedrooms, a buttery, a wood-shed, an attic staircase, and a cellar staircase, so that the walls may be said to be almost composed of doors. Lizer shares the attic with dried apples and empty trunks.

The cooking is all done at a stove, not at an open fireplace, a thing never to be seen in an American farmhouse. The staple articles of diet are pork and beans, and apple-sauce ; besides which, Dollie is an excellent hand at corn-bread and griddle-cakes. We get up at five, and Orange Zee and I go out and do "the chores"—in other words, attend to the stock, draw water, and make Dollie's fire, chop wood, &c. At six we breakfast, and at mid-day we dine, and at six we have supper and do our "chores" again. The quantity of things Dollie does by machinery is surprising. She washes with a machine, and she dries with a machine, and she sews with a machine, and can knit a pair of stockings in half an hour with a machine, and makes butter with a machine ; and pares apples with a machine ; and she "cans" tomatoes and sweet corn, and preserves black-

berries, and saves wood-ashes, and makes soap with "lye" (which is water that has soaked through them), and is a perfect repository of domestic receipts; and turns out on Sunday to go to meeting with a big "chignon," which she calls a "waterfall," and a long train, as neatly *chaussée* and *gantée* as if she lived on the Boulevards instead of on Beaver Lake. How she manages to effect these sudden and entire transformations is only one of the mysteries which attach to Dollie, and are a source of perpetual wonder and admiration to Orange Zee and myself. Then she takes in 'The Revolution,' and seems to me to have more advanced opinions on "Woman's Rights" than Susan B. Anthony herself; and she reads 'The Radical' regularly, and watches the new development of the religious idea of Boston with such keen relish that I sometimes suspect she is a secret contributor. I verily believe she is corresponding with those two strong-minded opponents of stringent ceremonial observances, Olive Logan and Eleanor Kirke, on the marriage question; but she does not at present admit either Orange Zee or myself into her reasons for always going to the post-office herself for her letters. We have perfect confidence in her, and are waiting without alarm for the results. So long as she is the most efficient house-wife in the county we have no right to complain; and I believe that it is when she is on her

knees scrubbing the floor that her most brilliant inspirations come to her, and suggest those abstruse problems of theology with which she occasionally plies Elder Fisher, much to that poor orthodox minister's embarrassment. Notwithstanding all which, there is not a Sunday-school teacher in the district (pronounced *deestric*) more universally respected and beloved; and no "sewing bees" are so popular as those which our pretty little Mrs Dollie gives alternately with Orange Zee's prayer-meetings in the front parlour. Upon these occasions the neighbouring farmers' wives flock to the manufacture of our "pants" and petticoats, and discuss the latest inventions in sewing-machines and theology over an abundant supply of tea. Dollie is a specimen of a new type developed since the race was transplanted to America, and is as peculiar to the soil as are the beavers which used formerly to inhabit our lake; and I believe, notwithstanding her regular attendance at Elder Fisher's, she is surely but silently sapping the foundations of his theology in the minds of a large section of his congregation. Like the beavers aforesaid, I sometimes think that Dollie acts entirely by instinct, and without any exercise of the reasoning faculty. She always speaks under some strong, quick impulse, which is irresistible to the listener. A beaver is taught by intuition how to make use of his tail: why should not the same intuition teach a

woman how to use her tongue? The fact that it has never done so yet, does not cause me to despair. Since I have known Dollie I have become sanguine. Orange Zee and I both feel that she is rapidly developing us into something, but we don't yet know into what. Time will show.

Meantime, like Dollie, we do as much farm-work as we can by machinery too. We have a sowing-machine and a mowing-machine and a reaping-machine. In the hot haying-time we mow before breakfast, and rake and cure our hay with horse-rakes and tedders, and load it by a patent process on to our waggon, and get our bright "Timothy" into our barn with another patent thing like a harpoon, the same afternoon. Think of that, you poor befogged farmers of the old country! The amount of hay that we two can cut, cure, and mow away in one day, is so great that I shall not mention it, lest you should imagine that I had been born as well as naturalised in America. We never stack it outside, and have a hay-press of our own, which we work, as we do most things, by horse-power, and press for our neighbours as well. We have a horse-power threshing-machine also, with which we thresh our neighbours' grain at from four to eight cents a bushel, and make a good thing of it; and by killing all our calves two days after they are born, and sending all our milk to the cheese-factory, we are able to contribute to the large cargoes of cheeses which

annually cross the Atlantic for consumption in the British Isles. What old fogies you British farmers are not to kill your calves, and so save the milk!

Then Orange Zee can do almost anything he wants with a plough and team: he has surface-drained all our farm with open ditches three feet deep with the plough alone. As for me, all my most brilliant inspirations in regard to agriculture have been suggested by the remarkable farming experiences published by Mr Horace Greeley in the columns of the 'Tribune.' I believe, in spite of Orange Zee's knowledge, we should have been repeatedly ruined, had it not been for the original ideas we derived from the lucubrations of that truly great man. Indeed, as I can't be of much assistance to Orange Zee by my practical knowledge, I endeavour to make up for it theoretically by studying the rural 'New-Yorker,' 'The Country Gentleman,' and other agricultural journals. Had I been allowed to have my own way, I should have invested in a variety of advantageous patents, and experimented upon a large scale with all the numerous varieties of oats, potatoes, tomatoes, and other produce which are warranted to make the fortunes of farmers courageous enough thus judiciously to risk their capital. Among the varied occupations of Orange Zee, however, he had passed a year of his life peddling patent rights, and

the information he had thus acquired in regard to their value induced him invariably to prohibit my ever buying one. This was a great trial to me, for scarcely a week passed without some eloquent traveller calling, and offering for a few dollars the exclusive right to make and sell in the county stoves warranted to season as well as cook meat; or fences which were cheaper and more durable than either wood or iron; or clothes-pegs which possessed the remarkable property of drying the clothes as well as of attaching them to the lines; or lightning-rods, which not only protected the house from lightning, but bottled up the electricity for private consumption;—besides many other ingenious contrivances which marked the fertility of the American brain. In fact I feel sure that, had it not been for Orange Zee, we might have become proprietors of many exclusive privileges which would have secured us a comfortable independence for our lives. I was confirmed in my opinion of my own good judgment and ability in these matters by overhearing myself spoken of one day as a “good, clever sort of fellow.” As Dollie made the same remark in regard to the stupidest man in the neighbourhood, I afterwards discovered that a “clever fellow” signified here a “good-natured fool.” After this personal application it was natural that the violent transformation which English words undergo after crossing the

Atlantic should rouse my indignation. I once seemed to plunge a whole supper-table into a douche-bath, because I remarked that a species of porridge called Graham Mush was "nasty." I do not yet know the exact meaning of this awful word, but it is evidently something more than the opposite of nice; and certain it is, that this cock-and-bull account of farm-life in America will be called there a "Rooster-and-Ox" story.

Besides our agricultural operations, we are called upon as good citizens to devote some of our attention to politics. The election of the town officers every year is an occasion of great excitement and intrigue. It is here that the youthful American mind acquires the rudiments of that exalted statesmanship which finds its full fruition in the adroit achievement of great State or national financial frauds. A "State" in America is divided into counties and towns; the towns are in fact rural districts, each one large enough for half-a-dozen ordinary English country parishes; in each town there may be one or more villages or hamlets, though the villages, properly so called, require charters of incorporation giving them municipal officers and independent local government. Where there is no such village incorporation, the town chooses annually its own officers: these consist of town supervisor, road commissioner, sheriff, constables, &c. Politics may thus be said to be

brought into the minutest details of every man's daily life.

For instance, Orange Zee, vowing vengeance against the old man, Dollie's father, and being also animated by the desire to attain the first round of the ladder by which he might possibly ultimately climb to the presidential chair at Washington, determined to put himself forward as the Republican candidate for the exalted office of town constable. In pursuance of which design Orange Zee donned his go-to-meeting coat, and after consulting Swomp, who was going himself to run for supervisor on the Republican ticket, drove to several of the leading Republican farmers, and announced to them that he had been so urgently pressed by his friends to have his name put upon the ticket as constable, that he had reluctantly consented, and that he would consider it a favour if they would support him. Meantime Swomp having held a private caucus of his friends at one of the "stores" in the village, decided upon the list of officers which they would offer to the Republican party in opposition to the list headed by the old man, who comes forward as Republican candidate in opposition to Swomp. A few days after, all the Republicans in the town rally to the Republican tavern, where Swomp's supporters hand each arrival a ticket containing his own name at the top, and Orange Zee's name at the bottom ;

and the old man's supporters hand each arrival a list with his name at the top: on receiving which the voters plunge into an inner room reeking with humanity, smoke, and profanity, where all the respective candidates and their supporters are struggling round a table, at which are seated the scrutineers; and after a day of confusion and excitement, Swomp's supporters announce triumphantly that they have carried their ticket, and Orange Zee returns to our longing arms covered with dust and glory, and smelling of whisky. But this is only a preliminary stage. The Democrats go through the same form a few days afterwards, and then both political parties having thus decided on their tickets, try issues with each other. It is only to be expected that a number of the old man's supporters, disgusted with their defeat, vote Democratic; but then a number of Democrats on the same ground vote Republican,—so the one set of malcontents about balances the other. Still the issue is as uncertain as it is in England, because a vote in America is worth as much money as it is in England, though it is only for the State, or United States Legislatures, that they are worth paying for in money: in their local elections the consideration is various, and may be illustrated by Orange Zee's own proceedings. He having a marvellous faculty for diving into the private affairs of his fellow-townsmen, went to some who had

large amounts owing to them, and promised, if they would vote for him, to collect their debts in his capacity of constable, and charge them nothing for it; and he went to others who he knew were overwhelmed with debts, and promised that if they would vote for him he would always give them warning before he came to distrain, so as to enable them to convey their goods away in time: in fact, Orange Zee managed so to impress people with the extent of the powers which he could wield to benefit those who voted for him, and to injure his opponents, that many who voted Democratic scored out the constables nominated on their own ticket, and substituted Orange Zee's name.

Thus it happened that although the Democratic ticket was finally elected, and Swomp and the old man both defeated, Orange Zee came in triumphantly at the tail of the Democrats—thus in these early days proving political capacity of a very high order, and inspiring both Dollie and me with great expectations for the future. I did not then know that Orange Zee had begun life as a boot-black in the lobby at Albany, and thus at a tender age had imbibed, as it were, through the soles of eminent politicians, those first principles which he was turning to such excellent account. Where life is one gigantic system of barter, one of the earliest lessons to be learnt is, how much one's social position, political influence, professional know-

ledge, and religious standing, are severally worth "on a trade."

Take the case of Gouge, who was elected democratic town supervisor against Swomp and the old man. Gouge was a director of the Van Snookville and Boghole Branch Railway. The V.S. and B.B.R. is Democratic; no Republican conductors, porters, and brakemen need apply. At the State elections the V.S. and B.B.R. vote Democratic to a man; and the nomination of the Democratic candidate for our Congressional district may practically be said to rest with the President and Board of the V.S. and B.B.R. Gouge had been first a porter, then a conductor, and finally had run a wild-cat on said railway with such success that he was promoted to station-master. To run a wild-cat for any length of time on a single line without an accident, requires both skill and daring. A wild-cat is a sort of extra goods train that has no stated times for running, but dodges from one station to another between the regular trains whenever the line happens to be vacant, and the engineer thinks he can reach the next station before any train leaves it, and go fast enough not to be overtaken by the lightning express behind him. Metaphorically, Gouge had run a wild-cat all his life; he had a wonderful faculty of dodging past people on his upward career. He knew so well the value of his position as station-master, that though his salary

was only a thousand dollars a-year, he managed by dexterous trading to exchange the information, opportunities, and power which his position gave him, for over twenty thousand dollars in two years. Gouge it was who saw how much money was to be made by a hotel at the depot; and he sent for his brother, who was a hotel-keeper, and promised to secure the privilege of the hotel to him, on condition that he should receive a share of the profits; and so he introduced Gouge junior to the President, who saw no objection to the scheme, provided he had another share in the profits. So the President and the two Gouges share the profits of the hotel between them. In the same way he secured a valuable railway contract for the leading Democrat in Van Snookville, upon the understanding that he should command the whole vote whenever he required it, a few refractory Democrats being "squared" with small shares in the contract, and the whole helping to swell the political influence of the President of the V.S. and B.B.R., who received besides a large pecuniary share in the profits of the contract. And so Gouge quietly slipped with his twenty thousand dollars from being station-master into the proprietorship of the 'Van Snookville Democrat,' which paper he worked so successfully for the interest of the railway and the Democratic party in general, and himself in particular, that when the Van Snookville National Bank

was started, the voice of public opinion unanimously pointed to Gouge as President; and Gouge finding himself, to use his own words, "reluctantly forced into this position of responsibility and prominence by his appreciative fellow-townsmen" (who are by this time so completely cowed by him, that they are afraid to call their souls their own), runs that flourishing institution, the First National Bank of Van Snookville, as he did the wild-cat, entirely for his own benefit. Is there any wonder therefore that, though the majority of the population of Van Snookville is Republican, by some mysterious dispensation the vote of the town is always largely Democratic? for could not Gouge, who is President of the First National Bank, Director of the V.S. and B.B.R., town supervisor, proprietor of the 'Van Snookville Democrat,' part proprietor of the Van Snookville Railway Hotel, and joint-owner with his son, who "runs it," of the principal store in the village, with one half of the population in debt to his bank, and the other half dependent in some form or other on the V.S. and B.B.R.,—could not Gouge, I say, bring such terrific pressure to bear upon any luckless individual who ventured to thwart his sovereign will, that life in Van Snookville would be a burden to him? If Gouge wants to force a public road across a man's field, all he has to do is to tell the judge, who owes his election to Gouge's influence, that he had better appoint

assessors prepared to "lay" the road thus, and do his (Gouge's) will, or he need never more hope to dispense justice in that neighbourhood. Gouge's life seems bent on the invention of political and social screws, and instruments of moral torture; and as all the functionaries are elected, and he practically controls the elections, he manages to work the electors and the elected against each other with such adroitness, that the power he wields may be said to be absolute. Providentially Gouge drinks! Van Snookville, as ungrateful as her rival Paris, to the man to whom she owes, if not her beauty, at least her prosperity, — Van Snookville, less bold than her "irreconcilable" sister, is afraid to vote "no" against her oppressor, but finds a grateful solace in the consolatory reflection that he drinks. For a week at a time whisky renders Gouge unable to rule over us. Then Swomp, who is perpetual arch-grand knight of the Good Templars, rallies his sons of temperance, and the leading church members enter into deep mysterious conclave as to the best means of ridding themselves from the hated yoke of Gouge.

The old man and Swomp sink their religious and trading animosities to combine against the common enemy; and a holy alliance is formed between the Methodists and Baptists, which results in the announcement that Splurge, the great revivalist

preacher, will shortly arrive, to quicken the slumbering consciences of the Van Snookvilleites; and the junior members of the community, of both sects and sexes, look forward with some little flutter of excitement to the prospect of "a protracted meeting," and unlimited opportunities of flirtation. It is hoped that by a tremendous effort of religion and morality Gouge may be crushed. I did not take any part in the revival myself, because Dollie did not approve of it, and she only allowed Orange Zee to go because he said he ought to be there in his capacity of town constable; but his real object was to act as spy upon Swomp and the old man, and report their machinations against Gouge, to that accomplished operator and boon-companion. Orange Zee, you see, did not believe that the great Gouge could be crushed, even by a Splurge, although that distinguished divine likened him to a roaring lion seeking whom he could devour, and called upon his hearers to "flee from him and his contracts, and his newspaper, and his hotel, and his store, and all his works."

During the fortnight that the protracted meeting lasted, all farming operations were suspended. It took place at a season of the year when work was not pressing, and day after day waggon-loads of old and young of both sexes, in their best costume, drove up alternately to the Methodist and Baptist churches; and the voice of Splurge might be heard

for some distance down the village street exhorting his hearers to come forward to "the mourners' bench." Here those who had been most powerfully acted upon made their confession and their profession, and from that time forward they were said to have "got" or "experienced religion." The exact number of persons who "got religion" during this visit of Splurge's was afterwards published among those interesting heart-statistics, if I may be allowed the phrase, which are to be found in those spare columns which the religious journals do not devote to abusing each other. It is quite an interesting study to turn over a file of these, and add up the total of broken and contrite hearts that have resulted during the year from the labours of the various Splurges all over the country, and to read how bitter these rival Splurges sometimes get with one another, and how jealous of each other's special gifts, and how furious are the feuds which arise from the difficulty of sharing the spoil. Even now the war which resulted from the Van Snookville revival is still raging, for Swomp declared that the old man had persuaded a number of those who intended to "experience" Methodist religion, to join the Baptist Church; whereas it had been clearly understood, before Splurge's arrival, that all the broken hearts he made were to be divided equally between the two denominations; but the fact is, on a trade, whether it be in human con-

sciences or anything else, the old man is always more than a match for Swomp.

The practical inconvenience of this revival was, that its influence was not confined to quickening the consciences only of those who benefited by it; they seemed to get quicker all over. One young man, before he got religion, with whom I was dickering for a horse, positively assured me he had paid 200 dollars for it, and could not sell it to me for less. Our trade was interrupted by Splurge for a fortnight, and at the end of it he had undergone the quickening process, and swore as positively he had paid 245 dollars for the animal.

This is only one illustration. I did not know of a single instance of greater honesty in trade after the revival than before it. It never once seemed to occur to two men of contrite spirit to say to each other, "Come now, we have persistently thought everything worth whatever we could get for it, irrespective of its intrinsic value, and have considered false representation in regard to articles we had for sale a merely venial offence; let us, now that we have got religion, never try to get more for anything than it is honestly worth." If even Splurge cannot venture to recommend people when they are asked for their coats to give their cloaks also, without extinguishing himself and his popularity as an imparter of the Christian religion

for ever, let him, at least, suggest that when a man asks for your coat, you should not turn upon him and strip him naked as an evidence of Christian "smartness." O my dear Splurge, I am sorry to have to tell you that my experience has been that the sooner men get over the effects of your labours on their consciences, the more I like to deal with them; and I would also venture to suggest that it is very difficult to give to others what you have not got yourself.

Orange Zee did not get religion, but he got a good deal of useful information, by the dexterous management of which he hopes to increase his social and political influence, and thus rise to higher spheres of usefulness.

I do not mean to divulge what these are—in fact I am at this moment interrupted by a piece of intelligence which for a time will disturb our domestic arrangements, and which involves to no small degree the future happiness both of Orange Zee and myself. I have before alluded to the remarkably philosophical and speculative character of Dollie's mind, and that we have both been conscious that her advanced habits of thought were not unlikely to produce a strong influence upon us. She has just imparted to us the important discovery that she has married the wrong Smith. I need not say that we saw it both in the same light instantly. Why it never flashed upon us before during the

last five years it is useless to attempt to inquire. It was the real solution of a great domestic problem, which, like Columbus's egg, we had missed from its extreme simplicity.

As the laws of divorce in the State in which we are now residing interfere in the most absurd and arbitrary manner with the private matrimonial arrangements of its citizens, we have determined at once to proceed to the more enlightened State of Indiana, and have telegraphed to have the preliminary measures taken: this will enable us to start to-morrow. Dollie, who has made herself acquainted with the whole course of proceedings, assures us that in that State the ceremony of divorce by mutual consent will not occupy above half an hour, and she then wishes to proceed to New York to have the marriage ceremony performed by at least two leading liberal divines. She is strongly inclined in favour of Mr Ward Beecher and Mr Frothingham. She says she does not care so much about the mere ceremony, but she wishes to commit those influential men to a great principle. Orange Zee asked her stupidly whether she thought it likely she would ever change back again. Dollie, of course, told him to mind his own business. Orange Zee said he thought it was his business; but his mind is so little able to rise above the ordinary interests of everyday life, that we never attend to what he

says on these more profound questions. Whether I am the Smith from whom Dollie is going to be divorced, or the Smith to whom she is going to be married, is not a matter of the smallest interest to my readers. I may tell them what happens to us in Indiana and New York, or I may not, on some future occasion; but I can't know till it is over whether it will be worth telling. Meantime, of this the public may rest assured, that Orange Zee, Dollie, and I, all have the strongest possible affection, esteem, and admiration for each other, and are all profoundly indifferent to anything the world may think of us.

A RAILWAY JOURNEY.

BY LADY MARGARET MAJENDIE.

[MAGA. APRIL 1877.]

A CLOSE cab laden with luggage drove up to Euston Station in time for the 7.30 A.M. train for the north. While the porters surrounded the boxes, the occupants of the cab passed straight through on to the platform, looking rather nervously about them. They were two — a very pretty girl in a most fascinating travelling costume of blue serge and fur, and an elderly woman, who, from her appearance, might have been her nurse.

“Sit here, and don’t move, Miss Edith, while I take your ticket: now, mind you don’t stir;” and she deposited her on a bench.

“Are you the young lady as has ordered a through carriage reserved?” asked a guard, with official abruptness.

“Yes.”

“Then come along of me, miss.”

“No, no; I must wait,” and Edith, who was quite unused to travelling, grasped her bag and did

not move. The guard looked astonished, but only shrugged his shoulders and walked off. Presently he came back.

"You'll be late, miss," he said, not encouragingly. "Train 'ill be off in another minute." Edith looked at him in despair. Should she leave her post? Would Jenkins never come back? A loud aggressive bell began to ring. Edith started up; she seized all the things Jenkins had put under her charge—rugs, carpet-bag, umbrella-case, loose shawl, and provision-basket—and was trying to stagger away under the load, when Jenkins came back very hot and flurried, seized half the packages, and hurried her to the train. The guard unlocked the special carriage and put her in.

"No hurry, ma'am," he said; "four minutes still."

"I don't at all like it, now it has come to the point, Jenkins," said Edith, leaning out of the window.

"Nor I, miss; and how your mamma could let you go all alone like this, passes me; but I have spoken to the guard and written to the station-master, and you've a good bit to eat, and not a blessed soul to get into the carriage from end to end; so don't be afraid, my dear, and I make no doubt that your dear uncle will meet you at the other end."

"I have no doubt that one of my uncles will

—I hope Uncle John, as I have never seen Uncle George."

"Everything you want, miss?" said an extra porter. "I have put in all the rugs and a hot-water tin, and the luggage is all right in the van just behind."

"All right, all right!" said Mrs Jenkins.

"Thank you, ma'am," said the porter, pocketing a shining half-crown.

A gentleman suddenly came running on to the platform; the train was just about to start. "Here, porter, take my portmanteau; quick—smoking carriage!"

"All full, sir! quick, sir, please!"

"It's Mr George!" cried Jenkins, suddenly. Edith started forward. "Oh!"

The gentleman caught sight of Jenkins. "Here, guard, guard! put me in here!"

"Can't sir—special."

"Quick; let me in! it's—it's my niece!"

The train began to move.

"Confound you, be quick!"

The door was opened just in time, and Edith, as excited as Mr George, seized him with both hands by the coat-sleeves, and pulled him in with all her might into the carriage. They were off.

Mr George sat down opposite to Edith with a sigh of relief.

"I am so glad to see you, Uncle George," said Edith, timidly; "for though I am generally bold enough, I was rather afraid of this long journey."

"I will take care of you," said the uncle. "I am very glad to make your acquaintance, my dear." The "my dear" sounded a little strained, as though it were not a common expression on Uncle George's lips, and Edith looked up at him. She had not expected her uncle to be so young in appearance; but she had often heard her mother say that he was the youngest-looking man of his age she had ever known; and now she quite agreed,—for though she knew him to be really about fifty-eight years of age, he might from his appearance be taken for five-and-twenty, or even less. He was remarkably good-looking—more so than she had expected—and his eyes looked very young, and frank, and blue. There was a twinkle in them also; she was sure that he was fond of fun. Edith felt quite fond of her uncle; she was not one bit afraid of him—his face was so open, and good, and kindly.

"Now we must make ourselves comfortable," said Uncle George, and he proceeded to set to work. He put the rugs and baskets into the nets, he pushed the carpet-bag and portmanteau under the seat, took off his hat, put on a very becoming Turkish fez, extracted newspapers from his pocket,

spread a shawl over Edith's knees, and then wriggled himself comfortably into a corner seat.

"How well old Jenkins wears!" he said. "She looks like a young dairy-maid."

"Oh!" said Edith, a little shocked at his irreverence.

"I remember how she used to feed me with dried fruit and macaroons out of the store-room."

"Really! surely she is not old enough for that?"

"Oh, ah! I forget her age; but the fact was, I wasn't of course a boy."

"Of course not. Why, I think mamma said that you and Jenkins were born the same day—or was she the eldest?"

"Oh, I was the eldest."

"No, you were not; I remember she was three weeks older than you, and it was because she was your foster-sister that she always was so fond of you. Indeed, mamma said that she wanted to leave her to go to you and Aunt Maria when your eldest children were born, even out to India."

"My eldest children! what do you mean? Oh! by the by, yes; they are dead."

"Dead! my cousin George dead?"

"Yes, yes, my dear."

"Poor little Addie? was it true that George never got over her loss?"

"Don't!" said Uncle George, abruptly; and he held up a newspaper upside down.

Edith touched his arm very gently.

"I am so sorry, Uncle George," she said, sweetly. "If I had known that you had lost them both, I would not have said anything; please forgive me. And poor Aunt Maria, too! Oh, I beg your pardon."

Uncle George threw down his paper and looked smilingly at her.

"Does your mamma ever speak of me?"

"Constantly, perpetually," said Edith, her voice still a little choked.

"And what does she say of me?"

"She says that you are the dearest, kindest, warmest-hearted, most sweet-dispositioned old gentleman existing; she says you have been a gallant officer, and a loyal, true-hearted soldier." Edith's eyes kindled. "And I have heard how you distinguished yourself in India, and I—I am very glad to see you, Uncle George."

"Yes, yes, he is all that," said he, with enthusiasm.

"What? who?" asked Edith, confused.

"My father—I—I—I mean my son."

"Poor George! he was a most distinguished soldier also. I wish I had known him. No, Uncle George, I won't speak so—I do not want to pain you."

"I like to hear all you tell me about him, my dear."

"I have only heard how good a soldier he was, and that he was so handsome and so good."

"And had he faults and defects?"

Edith looked surprised.

"I used to hear that he was conceited."

"No, no," said Uncle George, hastily; "he never was that. He was proud, I grant—perhaps too proud—but never conceited."

"Poor George!" sighed Edith; "I had so looked forward to knowing him."

"Had you really?"

"Yes; I never had a companion of my own age. Do tell me, shall I like my cousins at Hatton?"

"I think so, some of them: do you mean Uncle John's daughters, or his step-children?"

"Both."

"I think you will like Mary, tolerate Susan, abhor Agatha, admire Jane, and adore Alice."

"Alice is the adorable one, is she?" said Edith, laughing; "and is she the one they say is so pretty?"

"Oh no; poor Alice is deformed, and can never leave the sofa; but she has the sweetness of an angel and the courage of a martyr: she is not in the least pretty."

"Oh, what a trial! always on the sofa!"

"What a sweet little thing this is!" thought Uncle George, but he said nothing.

"How comes it that you know none of your cousins?" said he, suddenly.

"Why do you want me to tell you what you know so much better than I do, Uncle George?"

"Yes, yes, of course; but naturally I want to know your side of the story. Have you never been at Hatton?"

"Never; and I thought it so very kind of you to induce Uncle John to persuade mamma to let me go."

"Yes; I thought, you know, that a few companions of your own age would do you good. How old are you?"

"Did you not get mamma's letter, in which she told you that I was to be eighteen to-morrow?"

"No; it must have been late. I never heard of it."

"How very unfortunate! Then no one will know I am coming. She asked you to tell Uncle John about the trains and things."

"Oh, ah! *that* letter! oh, of course, that is all right. I don't—I—I sometimes don't read letters through."

Edith laughed.

"I will tell you one version of my story. Mamma being papa's widow, and papa having been the eldest son, had to leave Hatton when

I was born and turned out to be a stupid little girl; and she went abroad because she was so delicate, and became a Roman Catholic."

"Holloa!"

"What is it, Uncle George?"

"You are not one, I hope?"

Edith looked rather indignant. "It is *very* odd of you to say that," she said, "when you know as well as I do all that you did about it; indeed I shall never forget your kindness. I was very unhappy when mamma wanted me to change; and Uncle John's letters and all Aunt Maria wrote made it worse than ever, only your letters made all smooth; and mamma was so much touched by the one you wrote to her about papa's trust in her, and my not being hers only, and all that, that, indeed, I have always loved you—you have seemed to me like my own dear father."

"I am very glad, my dear child, and I hope that in future you will be guided by my advice."

"I hope I shall see a great deal of you, Uncle George, for I know how fond I shall be of you, for my mother loves you dearly."

"It is very kind of her."

"And do you know, since we came to live in England, I have never paid a single visit, or been for one week away from home. Oh, it is such fun going to Hatton! Do my cousins ride?"

"Yes, a great deal ; are you fond of it ?"

"I love it ; there is nothing in the world to me like a good gallop. Ah, it was the greatest trial of all my life when Queen Mab was sold !"

"When was that ?"

"Mamma made me give up riding, or rather I gave it up of myself, because it made her so nervous."

"What else do you care for?—dancing ?"

"Oh, I love it ; but I have never been to a ball in my life."

"There are to be two at Hatton next week, and you must promise me the first valse at each."

"Do *you* valse ?"

"Oh yes. You see I am not such an old foggy as you expected."

"No ; nobody would believe you to be fifty-eight, except for one thing."

"What is that ?"

But Edith blushed and would not answer.

"You need not mind, child—I never was at all sensitive ; and alas ! now my memory is not what it was."

"That's it," said Edith, eagerly ; "only I did not like to say it. Here we are at a station."

It was now ten o'clock ; Uncle George bought the 'Times' and 'Daily News,' and they both began to read. About twelve o'clock the pangs of hunger began to assail Edith, and she exclaimed—

"Uncle George, it is only twelve o'clock, and I must eat to live."

"I have been existing merely for the last hour with the greatest difficulty, but I have got nothing wherewith to refresh exhausted nature; I calculated on a bun at Carlisle."

"Hours hence! No, I am amply provided. Will you have beef or chicken sandwiches, or cold partridge, or what?"

They made a very good lunch, and uncle and niece grew hourly better acquainted.

"I believe we ought to look out of the window," said he, presently. "My father said that the country about here was quite beautiful."

"That must have been before the days of railways," said Edith, gravely. "Those coaching days must have been quite delightful."

"They were."

"Mamma has told me about that extraordinary adventure you and papa had on the Aberdeen coach."

"It was extraordinary."

"Papa caught the branch of a tree, did he not?"

"Yes; and do you remember what I did?"

"You jumped out just as the coach upset, and sat on all the horses' heads."

"And a most uneasy seat it must have been; and did Uncle Arthur—I mean your papa—remain suspended in mid-air?"

"No, he swung into the tree. I have often heard of your climbing exploits, and that when you were young you could climb any tree."

"I have not lost the power," said Uncle George, stretching himself. "Holloa!"

"What is the matter?" said Edith, startled.

"Nothing—nothing—sit still!"

But she followed the direction of his eyes. The train (a very long one) was going round a sharp curve, they were in one of the last carriages, and to her horror and terror, she saw, about a hundred yards in front of the train, a whole herd of cows on and off the line—two or three frantically galloping.

All heads were stretched out of the windows, clamouring tongues and even cries resounded from the other carriages, but neither Edith nor George uttered a sound, only she put back her hand and caught his; he seized it very tightly in the suspense, knowing well that a terrible accident might be impending. It was hardly a second, but it seemed a lifetime. The frantic cattle rushed off the line in a body, all but one unfortunate beast. The guards put on the very heaviest brakes, but the impetus was so great that the slackening was hardly perceptible. It may have been fortunate that it was so, for instead of upsetting the train, the cow was tossed off the line utterly destroyed, and the engine rushed on in safety.

George and Edith sat down opposite to each other; both were very pale.

"Thank God!" said Edith, and she covered her face with one hand. George did not speak, but he took off his cap and looked out of the window for one minute.

"Now I shall give you some sherry," he said, suddenly. "You are the pluckiest little brick I ever came across. Any other girl would have screamed."

"I never scream," said Edith, indignantly; "and I don't want any sherry."

"I am your uncle, and I say you are to have some—drink it up."

"I hate wine," she said, giving back the flask.

"There, good child, to do as you are told."

At the next station a perfect crowd of passengers was waiting for the up train. A great *fête* was going on in the next town for the visit of some royal personage, and the train was filled to overflowing. Presently the civil guard came up to the special carriage and said most deprecatingly that there was one gentleman who couldn't find a place anywhere; and as he was only going to the next station, would they admit him just for that twenty minutes? Uncle George consented very discontentedly, and very grudgingly moved his long legs to admit of the entry of a very stout old gentleman,

who sat heavily down, and received into his ample lap a perfect pile of packages and baskets, and a brace of hares and a rabbit tied by the legs which he had dexterously suspended by a string round his neck.

"Not worth while, indeed, my dear madam," he said, as Edith began to make room for his things. "Only twenty minutes—no inconvenience, I assure you."

The heavily-weighted train moved off. The old gentleman now began a series of playful bows which made the hares and rabbit dance up and down.

"It really was too good of you to admit an old foggy like me," he said, blandly; "for of course with half an eye I can see the tender situation."

A deep growl from Uncle George. He gave a little start and went on to himself—

"Sweet young couple! just wedded, eh?"

Edith felt half choked with laughter, but she managed to say convulsively—

"Will you give me my book, Uncle George?"

The old gentleman started, cocked his head as a blackbird does when he perceives a very fat worm, and muttered—

"Impossible!"

Edith and George were wrapped in their respective novels. The old gentleman sidged, sighed, and arranged his features into a most sanctimonious

expression. There was dead silence till he reached his station, where he descended. The departure bell was ringing, when his head suddenly reappeared at the window, the hares and rabbit streaming wildly from the back of his neck.

"My children," he said, "take my advice—go back to your friends. This——" A little shriek ended his discourse; the train was going on; and he, being borne along on the step involuntarily, two stout porters rushed to the rescue and lifted him off. Edith and George laughed till the tears ran down their cheeks.

"I could eat again, with a little persuasion," said George, presently.

"Why, what o'clock is it?"

"Just five, and we shall not get in till eight-thirty. Remember that we had our luncheon at twelve."

"Very well." And they proceeded to eat.

The sun had gone down, and the whole sky was gorgeous with gold and crimson light, on which great black clouds floated prophetically.

"What a grand sky!" said Edith.

"Magnificent! Nowhere does one see such clouds as in England."

"Were you very fond of India?"

"Of course I am; my work lies there, my hopes, my future."

Edith looked astonished. "I should have thought," she said, "that *now* you would have been content to rest at home; but I admire you for loving work. Shall you go out again?"

"That depends very much upon circumstances. It would be a great grief to me to give up my profession."

"It is very odd, but I certainly thought that mamma told me you had given up your profession."

"She was mistaken," said Uncle George, shortly.

"I have often longed to go to India," cried Edith.

"Have you?" said George, very eagerly.

"Oh yes, beyond anything; life there gives everybody a chance. I mean, heroic men and great characters are formed in India, and men have great responsibilities and development for quite a different class of most desirable qualities there."

"That is quite true; and you are just the sort of woman to help a man to do anything."

"I am so glad you think so, Uncle George," she said, laughing and blushing.

At seven o'clock they reached a very large station, where the train had half an hour to wait. They got a cup of tea, and then, both being rather cold, they began to walk vigorously up and down

to the very end of the terminus. It was quite dark at the far end, and they stood side by side, looking up into the mouth of the great station with its mighty arch. Trains rushed past, or heavily moved away with a harsh, discordant whistle. Great red lamps loomed out of the darkness like dragons' eyes. George drew Edith hastily on one side that she might not be struck by the chain of a huge cart-horse which passed close by them, on its way to bring up a coal-truck. It was very cold, and they stamped up and down, and George enjoyed a fragrant cigar.

"Take your seats!" shouted the porter. "Take your seats!" And they resumed their places.

"Them's a bride and bridegroom," said a stout country-woman to a friend; and the loud guttural "Lor!" with which the news was received reached the ears of the travellers.

A blazing lamp was in the carriage, and under its yellow light Edith tried to read.

"Don't read, Edith," said the young uncle, suddenly. "Talk instead."

She shut up her book.

"To tell you the truth, Uncle George," she said, "we are getting so near that I am beginning to feel ridiculously nervous."

He looked at his watch, and suddenly started.

"So late," he said. "We shall be there in ten minutes."

"Oh!"

"And the fact is," he began, restlessly fidgeting ;
"the fact is—a—a—I have got a confession to make
to you."

"To me! oh, Uncle George!"

"D—n Uncle George!"

Edith looked startled beyond measure.

"The fact is, Edith, I am not my father."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I am my son."

"But he is dead."

"No, no; only, what was a fellow to say when you
pressed me so hard? I am your cousin George!"

"Oh!"

"And we have been such friends, you won't be
angry? Are you vexed, Edith?" and he took both
her hands.

"No; only astonished. I think—on the whole,
I am rather—glad."

"That's all right; for, do you know, Edith, I
seem to have known you for years! You have
shown to-day every good quality a woman can
possibly possess."

"Don't spoil me by such sayings."

"And Edith, dear Edith, do you know—confound
it! here we are!—only this, I should like to go on
travelling with you, like this, for ever and ever —
and——"

Hatton ! Hatton ! tickets, please. Hatton !

"Here, Jones ! take Miss Edith's bag. Is the carriage up?"

"Yes, sir."

"And a cart ? there is a heap of luggage."

"All right sir."

"Come along, Edith ? here we are, and my father is in the carriage."

TALES FROM "BLACKWOOD."

A DOG WITHOUT A TAIL.

BY R. E. FRANCILLON.

[MAGA. MARCH 1875.]

I.

THAT blue sea at my feet is the Adriatic. I have read of it in histories and geographies, and now I see it—and it is a curious sensation to find that classic gulf so singularly like any other sea. It is like being introduced to one of Plutarch's heroes, and being surprised to find that, apart from the toga, he closely resembles the member for my county or the captain of my company of volunteers. I am in Molfetta, a place of which I had never read even in a newspaper; and that is a more curious sensation still.

I am not going to describe Molfetta. Murray

does, and advises his traveller, in effect, to shake the Molfettese dust from his feet, and to pass on to better quarters. Therefore, who cares for Molfetta? Not I. I did not like it when I was there, and shall never be there again. It is near Bari, but otherwise out of the world. There are no shops, there is no meat, no bread, no anything to eat save turnip-tops and macaroni; no anything else except a THEATRE. "*Voilà*"—to adapt the style of the French zoologist—" *Voilà Molfetta—voilà le chameau!*"

It is not unadvisedly that the word "theatre" is written large, while the name of the town that holds the theatre is written small. Molfetta was the frame, the suburb; the theatre was the picture, the citadel. Molfetta was the body, the theatre was the soul. In the theatre, and in the theatre alone, the people lived and breathed. I speak in the past tense, but of a past so recent, that I have no doubt the present would apply just as well. Operatic affairs formed the staple topics for debate and consideration in the municipal council, which met to discuss what stars should be brought from Naples or Milan at the public expense, and when the season should begin and end. The political parties of the place were distinguished, not by the paltry questions that agitate the rest of the world, but by partisanship with *la* Ranuzza or *la* Barbagianni—the rival *soprani* who in my time divided households and separated friends. The great public

did not pay very dear for its whistle, but enjoyed it hugely, and, so to speak, lived shut up in its own ear, like an oyster in its shell, careless of the winds and waves that stormed outside. This is no ideal exaggeration of a musical Arcadia, but the true character of the place, as accurately stated as if I were contributing to a gazetteer. And so, being at Molfetta, I did as the Molfettese do. I left the sweet Italian air, in which the aromatic peculiarities of the town almost overpowered the cosmopolitan fragrance of the sea—and the blue Italian sky, almost as blue as I have known that of England—and went to the theatre. I can occasionally tolerate operatic music, and there was nothing else to do. Besides, I don't like being set down as a madman; and as a madman I should have been most certainly set down if it ever got about that I had preferred listening to the song of the sea.

Why was I at Molfetta, despite my guide-book's warning? Why was I not at Trani, or Foggia, or Rome, or Margate, or the sources of the Nile? Ah, why are we ever anywhere—why are we in the world? But, if I can just tolerate music, I abhor metaphysics. This is the story of a dog, not of a man. Dogs despise metaphysics, and they are wiser than we, if honesty is any part of wisdom.

Mademoiselle Ranuzza was going to sing. The opera was one that I had once heard before, even in my native land, whither novelties travel slowly.

It was called "*Il Trovatore*." I was pleased; for if there is one thing that I hate even more cordially than metaphysics, it is an opera in which I do not know all the tunes beforehand. I am an Englishman, and yet am not ashamed. I can speak Italian with an accent which, as Italians say, "smells English"—and why not? Nobody blames a signor for talking English with a shrill accent that "smells Italian;" it is held graceful and interesting, and I have always held that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. But—I am in Molfetta; and I shall be there for ever unless I pass through the theatre doors.

II.

The curtain had not risen when I found myself seated comfortably enough in a stall in the second row from the stage, looking round at the audience and waiting for the orchestra to finish tuning. All the world was there—the Prefect, the Sub-Prefect, the Sindaco, the Count and the Cobbler. The Countess too was there, and the Cobbler's wife, and the wife of the Sindaco, and the sons and daughters of each and all. I, too, was there, sitting between a tall elderly gentleman with a red ribbon and grey moustache on one side and vacancy on the other. The two stalls immediately

on my left hand were as yet unfilled. Was it possible that as many as two seats should be empty in Molfetta on the same day?

No. A young man in full evening dress, white-gloved and white-cravated, entered at the end of some five minutes and took the next seat but one to mine. He was what most women—all English-women—would call a handsome young man. He was tall and lean, with a very long, thin nose, very black, expressionless eyes, sunken cheeks, a fearfully sallow complexion, and a strong short crop of jet-black bristles on his chin. There was something tragic, melodramatic, sombre, conspirator-like, in a word, *Italian* in his air—not real Italian, but book-Italian; he might have stepped straight from a school-girl's brain, like Minerva from the skull of Jove. It is such as he who have ere now turned the heads of young heiresses with their methods of conjugating *amare*, and have afterwards turned out not quite so fascinating in the character of husband as they were when simply professors of grammar. I like Italians—but not in my capacity of father to a family of growing girls; and this Italian was of the exact kind to which I, in such capacity, entertain the strongest natural antipathy. It was while fixing my first impressions of this formidable young man that I thoughtlessly placed my hat and cloak upon the seat that intervened between myself and him.

"Pardon me, signor," he said with the utmost politeness, "this seat belongs to a friend of mine, who will soon be here."

I apologised, and was about to remove my hat and cloak, when I was anticipated in a manner which, I venture to say, is new to the experience of any play-goer who has never been in Molfetta.

A black, shining nose, projecting from a tangled mass of rough grey hair, emerged from under the row of stalls before me, and two rows of yellow teeth caught hold of my cloak and pulled it into a heap on the dusty floor. My hat was treated, or rather ill-treated, in the same way; and then, before I could recover from my start, the seat beside me was occupied by the queerest of all the people that ever sat in an opera-stall—and queer enough people have sat in opera-stalls to give point to the comparison.

He was a large, rough dog, of no breed that I could recognise; it may have been indigenous and peculiar to Molfetta, but I am inclined to class him as *sui generis*, even there.

Poor fellow! He could not help the intermediate ancestors that separated him from the canine Adam and the canine Eve who originally fathered him and mothered him as well as the noblest St Bernard or the daintiest King Charles. For my part, I rather prefer mongrels—I am proud of being an Englishman. My fellow-mongrel was

ugly and rough; he had treated my new hat and my old cloak not too respectfully; his teeth looked strong and sharp, in spite of the yellow hue that told of a long career of bones—and, alas! some dire mischance had deprived him of the badge of every dog's self-respect—his tail. But, tail-less or not tail-less, a dog's eye is a dog's eye; and it turned on me and said, more plainly than words can speak—

“Who are you, that interfere with the comforts of a gentleman?”

Yes—you are a gentleman, although a mongrel, my next-door neighbour: I could see that with half an eye: and I murmured, “I beg your pardon, signor.”

But a dog in a theatre, with a stall to himself, and taking it as of right! That was the curious part of the matter. Church-going dogs I have known, but a play-going dog I never knew. I always supposed it to be against theatrical manners and customs to allow *cani*—as the Italians style good dogs and bad singers—to exhibit themselves in front of the scenes. What was yet more curious, nobody but myself took the least notice of this curiosity.

I am a timid Englishman, but I plucked up courage.

“Sir,” said I, this time to my neighbour's neighbour, “this gentleman—your friend—is he an *habitué*?”

"A regular subscriber. He takes two stalls—one for himself, one for me. It is kind of him, signor. I love music, and, if it were not for him——"

"Pardon me, your hearing music depends upon him? I don't quite understand."

"Without Muffino I go nowhere. Yes, signor, I once lost a whole week of the divinest music because the Town Council was considering whether Muffino should be admitted to the stalls or no. Signor, it almost caused a revolution!"

"A revolution?"

"Yes, signor. I threaten to organise a *claque* that shall close the house for a whole season. They compromise. I withdraw my threat on condition that Muffino shall be admitted; they withdraw their refusal on condition that Muffino shall pay. I see you are a foreigner, signor, or you would have heard all this long ago."

I ventured to introduce myself to Signor Muffino by laying my hand on his grey wig.

"He is a handsome dog," I said, thinking better of Muffino's master, or friend, than before. "It is a pity he has lost his tail."

The young man's brow clouded, his dark eyes grew darker, and he scowled.

"Signor," said he, "courtesy demands that we should not take notice of personal defects before the face of the unfortunate. Pardon me, signor, if

I observe that you are growing bald, very bald indeed, and that your whisker on this side contains already six grey hairs."

The rebuke was just. I was ashamed,—partly for my breach of good manners—partly, it may be, for those six grey hairs. I had thought there were but five. I held my tongue, and the curtain rose.

Would, O my reader, that you had seen the intelligent, eager eyes of Muffino blink and warm up when the music began! It was he, not I, that looked at the stage. I looked at him. The human audience listened to the music *à l'Italienne*: that is to say, they talked and laughed and let the music flow on, like tourists who find in beautiful scenery a sance for sandwiches and bottled beer. The canine auditor was silent and absorbed. Who can say what miracles sound, as well as sight, scent, taste, and touch, may not set working in a brain so much more acutely, intensely, sensitively receptive of outward things than the introspective mind of man? True, a dog cannot create; but the less the creative faculty the greater the appreciative power, as all the world knows. You have, of course, seen your terrier lift up his nose and howl as the German band played outside your window, or as your daughter practised finger-exercises or ran up and down the scale? You think it was because he hates music. Why? Do you expect him to show

his pleasure by clapping his paws? Watch his tail, curling and vibrating tightly with excitement, and remember how closely akin are intense pleasure and intense pain. He may suffer, but it is the ecstatic suffering of emotion that finds vent in that long-drawn, unconscious howl—in that snake-like writhing of the tail.

But, alas for Muffino! He had no Tail!

III.

Such was my first introduction to Signor Muffino of Molfetta.

Love me, love my dog. Conversely, as a dog would say, Love me, love my man. I liked what I came to know of Signor Muffino. He was a gentle fellow and a loving—as gentle as he was ill-bred, and as loving as he was ill-favoured. Not that he wanted proper spirit,—he was not one of those painfully large-hearted dogs who practise universal philanthropy and bestow their best caresses upon the boots that come oftenest and hardest on their hides. His was not that feminine love which takes kicks and gives kisses, but the masculine aspect of love that is called friendship when we wish to honour it with its highest name. I saw him bite once, poor fellow, when some clumsy foot in a crowd trod upon the toes of—

his master. I once saw him make a desperate charge to the rescue when some absent-minded philosopher, with his eyes doubtless upon the stars, was walking off with his master's gold-headed cane. He had to desert the substance of a bone in order to pursue the retreating shadow of the philosopher, and he never saw the bone again. It had been carried off by her ladyship the spaniel of the lady of the Sindaco. It was hard; for poor Muffino did not get too many bones, as I came to find out in course of time.

I am proud to say that I had the honour of being numbered among Muffino's friends. But I could not, somehow, swallow that cardinal point in his creed, Love me, love my man.

The dog's name we know: the man's was Benvenuti. To distinguish him from the half-hundred other Benvenuti in Molfetta he had been christened Onofrio. To distinguish him from the five-and-twenty fellow-townsmen named Onofrio Benvenuti he was called di Saverio, from his father's Christian name. To distinguish him from the twelve named Onofrio Benvenuti di Saverio, he had received the nickname of *La Jettatura*. So much the worse for him, for *La Jettatura* means the Evil Eye. My first disagreeable impression was somehow confirmed by his *sobriquet*. I did not like Don Onofrio Benvenuti di Saverio la Jettatura.

Everybody knows what a terrible thing it is to

get a reputation for the Evil Eye. It may blight the happiness of the most amiable, nay, of the otherwise best beloved of men. But when the brand is fixed to one who is the reverse of beloved, it is a horrible thing indeed: and, in this case, nobody liked La Jettatura. My prejudice was justified by public opinion.

He was a *mauvais sujet*, a black sheep, a ne'er-do-weel, a *valniente*. To adapt a celebrated passage of Macaulay, what the black sheep is to the mere ne'er-do-weel, what the *mauvais sujet* is to the black sheep, what the *valniente* is to the *mauvais sujet*, what the Molfettese *valniente* is to other *valnienti*,—such was La Jettatura to the other *valnienti* of his native town. Ever since he had been born, as I made out from my friend the Sindaco, he had borne a bad name, independently of his *sobriquet*. Some people are born with silver spoons in their mouths, as we all know; but we do not know as well as we ought that some are born with ne'er-do-weel, or black sheep, or whatever the synonym may be, marked as clearly on their foreheads as if it were tattooed there in sepia or gunpowder. Do what they will, the unfortunate victims can never get rid of their birth-brand, though they may lead the life of St Anthony. For the most part, however, they do not lead the life of St Anthony; they feel, and not unreasonably, the force of the maxim, "as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb," and act accordingly.

On making more minute inquiries into the matter, however, it seemed to me that La Jettatura had been thus labelled less on account of anything he had done than of much that he had not done. He was very unlucky and very poor.

His poverty was perhaps his own fault, for it was possible at Molfetta to keep body and soul together for the price of his kid gloves and opera-stalls. But then, if he had not made the theatre the first and paramount charge on his little income, he would have been scarcely an Italian of the south—certainly no Molfettese. To sit anywhere but in a stall would have appeared to him a contradiction in terms; and as to the expense of the second stall, I only wonder he did not buy kid gloves for Muffino. Whether his want of luck can be so easily accounted for, I am less sure. He had been more than once suspected, once caught red-handed in the fact, of cheating at dominoes. Yet, none the less, he was a chronic loser in games of chance. It was the winners, in his case, who found out the loser, and they laughed who won. He it was who played the part of hero in a certain *comediotta* wherein an irate peasant of the neighbourhood found somebody hidden away in a cupboard of which his wife kept the key. He was not the only Onofrio Benvenuti who called upon the peasant's wife, but the others were not found out, and La Jettatura had to bear the sins of them all. It was

he, grave, wise, stern as he looked with those deep-set eyes of his, that went so far as to draw a knife upon one who had provoked him beyond mortal endurance. He was, nevertheless, obviously the turbulent aggressor : his opponent had been guilty only of using the weapon which, though sharper than a sword, is not held to justify the reply of naked steel. In a word, he was an idle, not over-wise, singularly unlucky young man, who, in a very laxly laced place, had somehow contrived to earn the character of a rogue, a *roué*, and an assassin. He was a weak vessel filled with water which his friends and neighbours were doing their best to turn into the gall and vinegar of misanthropy.

Wretches that we are—to be the only created beings that have a word to express hatred for our fellow-wretches. Apes have no word for it ; nor even parrots, despite the bad language we have managed to teach them. And as for Misocyony—dog-hating—there is no such barbarous, no such impossible word : there could not be, even if to the dogs should go the language of him who sang of the Dog of Ulysses. But forward !

The young man, without luck or good management to make up for his want of principle, found in Muffino alone one who never found him out, who never provoked him to anger, who never betrayed him. I never, in his presence, ventured to refer to

the loss of the tail again; but I heard the story from another and more reputable acquaintance of mine—one of the numerous priests with whom Molfetta, the seat of a seminary, swarms. It is a terrible legend. Englishman as I am to the backbone, it makes me shudder from my sensorium all the way down the series of vertebræ which should in the human race, and does in the canino race, terminate in a tail.

The cupboard of La Jettatura was bare—very bare. “Come, my Muffino,” he said, “let us have a shake at the dice-box.” He thought of ivory in its relation to silver. Muffino pricked up his ears and wagged the tail of which he then was proud. He thought of ivory in its relation to Bone.

Their way to the dice-box led them past the church of San Gennaro: and La Jettatura, as pious a youth in his way as Schiller’s Fridolin, thought, “I will ask a blessing on the ivories for luck: it can do no harm. What is more,—for every time I throw double sixes, Sant’ Onofrio shall have a taper—long sixes on my honour,” or whatever these terms of commerce may be in Molfettese. So they went in—there was plenty of time before the breakfast-hour at which they expected to find one or two young men from the *Commune* whom they might induce to try a throw or two before returning to the labour of carrying on the municipal government of Molfetta.

The church was nearly empty. One priest, my informant, was engaged in some duty at the high altar, of the nature of which I am not informed. La Jettatura took his place in a side chapel before the altar of Sant' Onofrio. Muffino pattered about here and there, thinking, I doubt not, "I have heard of church mice: are there church rats, I wonder—and if so, where?"

Suddenly a loud exclamation, in language singularly inappropriate to a church, startled La Jettatura from his knees.

My informant, the priest, knew not whether he was on his head or his heels. He was only aware of a leap and a spring—of two rows of sharp teeth that struck against his fingers—it might have been dog, it might have been devil, for aught he knew. The red light still burned before the high altar, but the wafer was gone. It was not he who had cried out—he was too thunderstruck to cry. But, before he was fairly on his feet, La Jettatura was surrounded by the unfailing little crowd that, when there is the least pretence for excitement, springs up from the flag-stones of an empty church as inevitably as from the paving-stones of London, or from the sands of a desert island. Six old women, eight boys, the sacristan and a gendarme, formed a circle round La Jettatura. And between him and them stood Muffino, holding a wafer delicately in

his teeth, as if to say: "See what I have found! Here is food for us both; the cake for you—the crumbs for me."

I am aware that what I have just told may savour a little of irreverence to some to whom I would not give any real cause of offence for the world. All I can say is that the story is Truth's, and not mine. If I am right in my doubts, still I may not insult her by making apologies that she scorns. If I am wrong—as I trust I am—I apologise, most humbly, for insulting any of my readers by supposing them capable of seeing harm in the anecdote of a good and self-denying heart, whatever it may be. Truth could not be irreverent even if she tried.

Meantime, while I am standing hat in hand, and begging pardon before I am blamed, the Church, by the hands of the law, had grasped poor Muffino under her strong arm.

La Jettatura was the most horror-stricken of all. If the earth had opened and swallowed up both himself and Muffino he would not have been surprised. He was indeed an unlucky young man: and from that day forward he rejected the patronage of Sant' Onofrio.

What was to be done? The crime could not be expiated, save in one way. *Muffino must die*; and justice was sixteen to one.

No—not to one! La Jettatura was a weak, even

a timid man, when face to face with a gendarme. But, were Muffino to be condemned to Malebolge, then Malebolge must be the doom of Muffino's master too. *Ora e sempre*—in life and in death these two were one: and now, against the crowd, the one was two.

"Let him go—let Muffino go!" exclaimed La Jettatura. "I will give you——"

"What will you give?" asked the gendarme, with a wink at the sacristan.

The young man hung his head—there would be no use in promising wax tapers to a gendarme, and his pockets were empty of all but vows. But meanwhile Muffino began to struggle—he was strong, and it was as much as his captors could do to keep him in hand. The sacristan grasped him by the scruff of the neck—the gendarme laid hold of his tail—the old women began to draw back, and the boys danced round and round them all. But there was little hope for Muffino. He was strong, but so was the sacristan and so was the gendarme.

Muffino's master was filled with despair. In imagination he already saw the corpse of his faithful friend, his only believer, swinging in the piazza, or swollen with salt water and tossed about in derision by the blue waves of the Adrian Sea, Only a dead dog—but what did not that mean to him? Muffino meant to him home, sympathy,

and even conscience. For, bad as he might be, and luckless as he was, he was accompanied in the person of his dog with a constant, though unapproachable, standard of honour and honesty.

He prayed, he threatened, but the sacristan was too horrified to listen; and the gendarme, though less horrified, was not going to be beaten by a dog, and bullied by a fellow that could not afford a *buona mano*. He was an officer of justice; and justice, in one sense or another, must be "done."

At last a sudden thought struck La Jettatura.

"I am very sorry," he said, quietly, letting the arms with which he had been energetically gesticulating fall down by his sides. "It is not the dog I'm trying to save—it's all of you. But never mind. You can't say it's my fault when you, Sacristan, or you, Gendarme, take to bark like a dog, and foam, and go into fits at the sight of water, and die in agony. He's *mad*—that's all."

As chance would have it, Muffino at the moment snapped at the fingers that clutched his throat. The sacristan let go, and started back with a yell.

"Now! now, Muffino! Run!" cried La Jettatura, pointing to the open door.

But, alas! he spoke too soon. His head, indeed, was free—but he could not run. The gendarme, who had been on the point of letting go with as much speed as the sacristan, saw through the

game. He grinned, and held on like grim death to Muffino's tail.

"The mad dog!"—"The Evil Eye!" cried out the little crowd; but the gendarme, being at the safe end of the dog, and wearing an infallible charm, made of coral and shaped like a horn, against the eye of the dog's master, held on like a hero.

But it is wonderful what presence of mind, when summoned by love, will do. In one moment, more quickly than I can call up the scene, the ready knife of La Jettatura was in his hand. The blade flashed—Muffino was off and away. The gendarme fell prostrate on the stones of the church—his feet flew up—and he grasped in his hand a dog's tail.

La Jettatura sheathed his knife, and cried like a child.

IV.

So ended that adventure, if adventures can ever be said to end. La Jettatura wept, the eight boys laughed, the six old women screamed, the sacristan stood agape, the priest recovered his wits, and Muffino was saved.

But the gendarme did not like being laughed at by the eight small boys. His *prestige* was gone.

"You shall pay for this, signor!" he grumbled, as he walked away, with his own tail between his legs and Muffino's in his hand.

The poor Jettatura! No wonder he was sore when I remarked upon the personal peculiarity of Muffino. Worse than stabbing himself to the heart had been that severance of Muffino's body from Muffino's tail. He did not go to throw dice at the *café*—he had no heart for food. He went home to his bare cupboard, and his soul sank within him when he opened the door. He had followed a track of gore up the stairs.

I once knew a dog who loved all men save one; and that one was a country surgeon who had performed upon him the villanous operation of cercotomy, or tail-shortening, which certain would-be improvers upon nature think an addition to canine beauty. He had done it treacherously, and under the guise of friendship, and he was never forgiven. His gentle victim somewhere found a special look for him that said, as plainly as words could speak, "Fool—to think you could mend what wagged at you in love! You shall be punished by seeing my stump still wag for all but you:" and the surgeon never met the eyes that excluded him alone from their kindness without remorse and shame. But this was not the story of Muffino and La Jettatura. The two poor fellows came up crouching one to another, saying, "Muffino, forgive me"—"Onofrio, thou art forgiven." I should not like to count the tears they shed between them before that sad day was over.

"A child will weep a bramble's smart,
A maid to see her sparrow part,
A stripling for a woman's heart ;
But woe awaits a country, when
She sees the tears of bearded men.
Then, oh what omen, dark and high,"

fell over Molfetta that day? The young man wept, despite his beard ; but you have not seen the most touching sight on earth till you have seen a dog shed tears. Think not he cannot, for he can.

And so they at last went to bed, not only without breakfast but without supper, but dearer friends than ever, if that could be.

But, alas ! after the battle of San Gennaro, La Jettatura obtained more than ever an evil name. There were tongues that scrupled not to charge him with having set on his dog to commit sacrilege, and of having drawn his knife on the representative of the law. In quarters where to be called Free-thinker or Garibaldino was to be abused, he received those titles ; while the party of progress asked, "What was he doing in a church at all?" Thus his presumed impiety condemned him with the conservative admirers of La Ranuzza : his presumed piety with the liberal following of La Barbagianni. For a long time he hung his head whenever he was spoken to, as if it were he and not Muffino who had lost his tail. By-and-by—there is no explaining the course of such things—it became "bad form," as we say in English, to associate with Muffino's

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master. Those who did were held to reflect a little of his blackness, while he in reality caught more and more of theirs, for it was only the disreputable who tolerated him now. It must have been unspeakably painful to the poor young man, whose heart was not very far out of the right place, to see mothers catch up and hide their children when the tail-less dog and the Evil Eye passed by.

How he clung to the cur for whose sake he was sinking into outlawry—into an Italian Coventry, which is even more cold and desolate than that of Warwickshire! When I think of it, I almost feel my own eyes begin to swell. It was touching to see how jealous he grew if Muffino chanced to lick any hand but his own; it made him quarrel with me for three days, and would have made him angry with me for four if I had not made peace by bringing Muffino some little luxuries in the shape of some particular cakes of which he was passionately fond. Even then, when regarding Muffino's watering mouth, he seemed to be thinking, "*Timeo Danaos*," but he grasped my hand. I did not like the man, but for Muffino's sake I could not help being his friend. He lived for Muffino.

Which loved the other best I do not know. In love, they say, it is always one of the two that loves, while the other consents to be loved. In grammar, as we know, the two voices of "to love"

mean different things. But it was all one in the end. Dog's love is the best love; but it is not easy to say in this case which was the most perfect dog's love—the dog's or the man's. If La Jettatura should die, Muffino would never be consoled: he would probably break his heart upon his master's grave. But—if Muffino were to die! . . .

And so, during my stay at Molfetta, they lived on—always in the hottest water, always in the coldest shade: always in scrapes, and never getting out again. And yet somehow, in spite of all, I am sure they were not unhappy. La Jettatura never did anything right—but then he had Muffino. Everybody scorned him—but Muffino; everybody avoided him—but Muffino. He had no brains, no thoughts, no knowledge, no luck, no friend, no self-respect, no money, no aims, no hopes, but he had—Muffino. And Muffino had La Jettatura.

V.

The summer was unusually hot that year; so hot that I began to think the pleasure of our English summer is not so highly rated as it ought to be. "Three hot days and a thunderstorm" is better than thirty red-hot days without a shower of rain, in spite of foreign sneers at us and our ways. It was not without much joy, tempered with singu-

larly little regret, that I was at last on the eve of leaving Molfetta—as I hope and trust—for ever. I was surfeited with “Il Trovatore,” while beef had become a memory. Half a stone of me had gone to feed the sweet but greedy southern air—the vampire atmosphere that intoxicates with dreamy siestas and robs us of blood and sinew. I was in a Capua of macaroni and turnip-tops, and was home-sick for a glass of beer.

I was paying a visit to the Sindaco, *pour prendre congé*, and was carrying on a lively and interesting conversation with the better half of that functionary—the owner of the little spaniel that had once robbed Muffino of his bone. As I have called our conversation lively and interesting, I must explain. It was about what we had respectively had for dinner during the last seven days—a topic, next to the opera, of unfailing interest to the Molfettese mind. What music was to our politics, such was the alternation of macaroni and turnip-tops to our weather. We had just come to the conclusion that, having fared precisely alike on five days out of the seven, we were a curiously sympathetic couple, when we were startled by the firing of a gun.

Scarcely had we recovered from the start, when a young man from the *Commune*, with whom we were both acquainted, rushed into the room in a state of wild excitement—wild even for the excitement of a Molfettese.

"Ah, Don Ulisse!" exclaimed the lady, "what was that gun—is it the Revolution?"

"The Revolution! It is worse than the Revolution ten thousand times—it is a Mad Dog!—and if I am bitten——"

"*Diaminé!* My Fida—where is she?—oh, if she is bitten——"

"Calm yourself, dear signora," I said. "And you also, Don Ulisse. I will go and look for Fida. Muffino!" I thought, as I seized my hat and hurried off to warn La Jettatura. "Muffino—all the curled Fidas in the universe, nay, in Molfetta, are not worth a hair of thy tail that used to be—and if thou art bitten——"

I hastened to the piazza, and learned the cause that had thrown the whole town into a wilder commotion than if Garibaldi himself, with all his red shirts, had come marching into Molfetta. A strange dog—who had come, none knew whence—and had gone, none knew whither, had passed through the street, as straight as an arrow, like a Malay running a-muck, with foaming lips and haggard eyes. He must have been a very canine Proteus—a dog-fiend. Some said he was as black as Cerberus—some painted him white, some grey, some brown, some tan. He was long-haired, short-haired, rough, smooth, long-legged, short-legged, everything, all at once, that a dog could be.

"Are you sure there was such a dog at all?"

I asked one of the chattering, gesticulating crowd.

"It is as sure as that he is mad, Eccellenza!"

"And are you sure that he was mad?" I asked another.

"It is as sure as that he lives, signor!"

Well—any way, the dog was not in Molfetta now. Fact or fiction, mad or not mad, he had vanished into the nowhere whence he had sprung. But with him the peace of that peaceful town had vanished too. Who knew what other dogs he had bitten on his course, and thus infected with his horrible sin? Perhaps one only—but then which one? Perhaps none—but who could tell? Doubt was worse than certainty: and every dear domestic friend had been transformed into a suspected public foe. At last, suddenly, the word went round that the municipal authorities were met in solemn session at the *Commune* to consider the best means of calming the public mind. We breathed more freely—Molfetta could trust its Sindaco.

Another report. A councillor—who kept no dogs—had moved: "Considering that some or any dog may have been infected with hydrophobia; considering that the delinquent is and must remain unknown: it is decreed that every dog who has been seen in the streets this day within our jurisdiction, without regard to rank, sex, or age, shall be forthwith arrested and condemned to death as

suspect; and the police are charged with the execution of this decree."

Third report. Molfetta is divided into two factions: those who, owning no dog-favourites, approve the resolution *verbatim et literatim*, and those who would add, by way of amendment, "except my own." I have not seen La Jettatura.

Fourth report. The council grows stormy. The Sindaco is pleading for Mademoiselle Fida.

Fifth report. The wife of the Sindaco has sent a message. "If Fida is not excepted, declare Molfetta in a state of siege." The Sindaco, though he hates Fida, is battling in a minority of one.

Sixth report—very late in the afternoon. The Sindaco has yielded. Like Brutus, he sacrifices Fida, and his own domestic tranquillity, upon the altar of his native town. The decree is voted, *nemine contradicente*. The death-warrant of every dog in Molfetta is signed.

"But not Muffino's!" I said, when the latest news was told. "I am an Englishman—the Union Jack shall protect Muffino." Alas! my vaunt was vain.

I was on my way to the lodging of La Jettatura when I met my poor friend hanging by the nape of his neck from the hand of a tall, strong gendarme. He caught sight of me, and turned upon me his pleading eyes.

"My friend," I said to the gendarme, "You will oblige me by selling me that dog for ten *scudi*."

The fellow grinned. "You are joking, Eccellenza—a dead dog is not worth a *centesimo*, and I am an honest man."

"Twenty *scudi*, then. Thirty. Forty. Take fifty, and give me Muffino."

"Not a hundred, Eccellenza. This is the mad dog—the mad dog, Eccellenza! He himself, for whose arrest a reward and promotion is promised at the *Commune*."

"Nonsense. The mad dog—if there ever was one—had smooth hair."

"This is smooth hair, Eccellenza."

"What? Then I tell you the mad dog had rough hair."

"Eccellenza, this is rough hair—very rough, indeed."

"Gendarme!" I said sternly, "tell me—are you the—the—the—man who once held Muffino's tail?"

The poor captive raised his nose to the pitiless stars and whined—such a despairing, protesting, appealing whine! The gendarme, the brute, grinned again, and passed on.

Muffino, the gentlest, tenderest, truest, sanest of gentlemen, to fall a victim to the miserable revenge of a scoundrel of a gendarme! It was not to be borne. I spent that evening, the whole night indeed, in striving to gain a reprieve, but in vain. I might as well have spoken to the stars, or to the

sea. Had not La Jettatura himself cried out "Mad dog!" in the church of San Gennaro? Had not the gendarme, the perjured scoundrel, seen the strange dog snap at Muffino? Did he not look mad? Were not his jaws perceptibly foaming? Was there not already a dangerous gleam in his eye?

Ah! and so there would be in your eye or mine were we, by a jury of dogs, condemned to suffer on the scaffold for what we had never done.

"The ordeal of water!" I demanded.

Water was brought. He drank greedily. "See how mad he is!" they said; "they always drink like that before the paroxysm comes on." And then there was that horrible decree. How should Muffino escape when Fida was doomed? If the decree itself were repealed for others, it could not be repealed for him.

I began to hear the name of "Mad dog" coupled with that of "Mad Englishman." And then I remembered that he, whether dog or man, whose name has once been joined with the epithet of mad, may as well cut his throat and hold his tongue. I yielded to the only power that is stronger than the will of man—I was conquered by the injustice of the world.

VI.

The next day was the 24th of August. The 24th of August is the feast of Saint Bartholomew.

I dared not call on La Jettatura to tell him the result of my advocacy. My heart would not carry me beyond a visit to the mistress of Fida. She was, by nature, no deeper than a saucer: but the saucer held a storm. I called on her because her window looked upon the piazza; and I had not long to wait for what I came to see.

I have seen all the remarkable public spectacles in the world—a bull-fight in Seville, a carnival in Milan, a revolution in Paris, Lord Mayor's day in London. But I never have seen, and never shall see, so strange a sight as the *cortège* that I witnessed in Molfetta that day. I see it slowly filing before me as I write: it haunts my dreams.

By a strange coincidence, some heavy bell is tolling when a gendarme enters the piazza, carrying under his arm a handsome white dog, of some Pomeranian breed, who bore to his untimely death that air of placid indifference which marks the half-civilised races: his fox-like features betray no emotion, and his feathery tail curls jauntily over his back, like the plumage of an Indian brave who goes to the stake as calmly as he sends others there. But, if he is calm for himself, there is one who is not calm for him. Near enough to give him

a last caress if she dared, follows the brown face of his little playmate—a girl of some ten years old, whose large brown eyes overflow with tears for one whom her warm heart no doubt loves all the better for his snowy calm. I think, for that hour, she believes herself beyond the reach of comfort until she dies. Round her neck, unheeded, is thrown the arm of a lad a little taller than she. He ought to feel jealous of such grief for another, and he looks tenderly, not upon the Pomeranian, but on her. But there is a proud flash in his eye that bespeaks him a generous rival, and I suspect that, when he grows up, Law and Order will have gained another foe. Many a Beppo or Tonio has turned brigand or rebel for less cause than because the gendarmes took away Marietta's dog and made her cry. But another group follows upon the scene.

Here is a second gendarme, leading by a frayed rope a prince of royal blood—perhaps a king. He is a splendid retriever, gorgeously combed and curled, with a silver chain round his neck, in melancholy contrast with the knotted halter. There is no indifference about him, but there, in the calm of his mournful dignity, I read the pride of fallen majesty. He is followed to the scaffold by my right-hand neighbour in the theatre—a tall, soldier-like, grey-moustachioed colonel. I know him at once—he has fought at Solferino and Magenta for Italia and Nero, and this is his reward. Still there

is no rebellion in the old soldier's face : it is bowed not with anger but with sorrow. Even so would he follow the *Rè galant'uomo* to his grave.

But from this noble pair my attention is drawn by a sharp cry. Kicking, struggling, biting, yelping in the hands of three gendarmes is a tiny terrier, who seems to have been endowed all at once with the agility of a monkey and the strength of a lion. There is neither stoicism nor majesty about this little rebel ; as if prescient of his coming fate he makes a last frantic fight for life and liberty. He to be cut off by public tyranny in the flower of his years ; he to be torn from the dear old bones that lie cunningly buried in a certain corner of the yard at home ; he to be destroyed before the work of his life—the worrying of that cat—is but half performed. No wonder he yelps and kicks, and makes fearful havoc with the fingers of his captors. Behind and around him run friends scarcely less frantic than he : they vociferate, gesticulate, threaten, and implore—children, father, grandmother, neighbours, make a tumult as if the end of one little terrier meant the end of the world.

Now comes a pitiable sight—a houseless vagabond of the streets, grey, toothless, half bald with mange, to whom death should come as a relief—he has no mourners to see him die. Pass on, poor dog, to death, the friend of the friendless and the poor ! Then—the wife of the Sindaco turns away

her eyes. It is Fida. The child of luxury follows the outcast to a common grave.

But for shame! I also turn away—the pampered little tyrant looks up in the gendarme's face, and licks his hand. I blush for my order. *A bas les aristocrats, à la lanterne!* Then follows—yes, a pug—a Silenus, bloated with fat, with black, flat nose, and ungainly gait, waddling rather than marching to his doom, and by his side a graceful lady, beautiful I am sure, though I cannot see her face for the handkerchief she holds to her eyes. Then a whole boat's crew of fishermen and lads—one with a sweetheart—following a mongrel with measured tread, black looks, and ominous silence: then three generations of mourners bewailing a poor little sleek, soft, fat, curly puppy, not two months old, who whines and whimpers and fights about feebly with his innocent baby paws, not struggling, but feeling and crying for the mother who has not yet left off loving him, and follows after, howling her protest to the sky—to the heaven that gives from the earth that takes away. I think these two might have been tied with the same cord. And so on and on they come—

“Both mongrel, puppy, whelp, and hound,
And cur of low degree”—

mourned—most of them—with tears, every one of which was honest and true. So honest is a dog

that hypocrisy dares not stand even by his tomb. But then, except a loving memory, he has nothing to leave.

Stop,—my own heart turns sick. It is Muffino.

How dare I tell the rest? I read in his more than human face tears wrung from the soul—not for himself, but for the unhappy young man who, in him, is about to lose his only friend. Ah, but you say, how does he know that he is being led to die? How should a dog—only a dog—know what death means?

He knows not; but he knows the Shadow that tells of a long, long parting. What dog is there who does not wander sadly about the house, from room to room, when he sees the boxes being corded, and the chairs covered up, that tell him of a journey on the morrow he is not to share? It is the same even if he knows not what parting means till now, though but for a day. And does not the coming shadow of that parting which dogs are told to believe is eternal—should not that shadow be felt as no other shadows are? Whatever the master feels does not the dog transmute into sympathy? Muffino knew not death, but he knew his master's soul.

May I never, while I live, again behold such wistful, unselfish sorrow in the eyes of a dog—such blank despair in those of a man. The dog, without the sign of canine honour, the man, without the badge of human self-respecting pride, clung to one

another with the love of those who, but for one another, stand alone in the world: with eyes in which shone the love that passeth the love of man for woman, ay, and the love of woman for man. They were but a witless man, a tail-less dog; but each to each was all in all.

And — oh shame once more! — it was round MUFFINO that surged the crowd of those miserable beings who had no dogs to mourn. It was he whom the vile mob mocked and jeered as the MAD DOG who had brought about the panic and the massacre and the woe — the mad dog that obeyed the Evil Eye. I could foresee the howl of execration that would go up from the mourners themselves when death, public and ignominious death, came to the turn of him who had robbed them of those who were less dear to them than Muffino was to La Jettatura. That howl would be his requiem — he had lived a martyr to faithful love, and would die a victim to the injustice of man. . . .

"*Cielo!* what an ugly cur!" said the wife of the Sindaco. "I knew he was hideous; but I never knew what a hateful brute he was till now."

.
"It is all over," said Don Ulisse, entering the room at the end of about an hour.

"And Fida?" asked the wife of the Sindaco.

Don Ulisse shrugged his shoulders. "Fida is no more."

"Then go at once to Bari and get me another spaniel instantly. And mind he is pretty—prettier than Fida."

I left without a word. Indeed when I left Molfetta I left no *addio* for the lady, who no doubt sets me down as the rudest of Englishmen. Let her—I don't care. But I did care about La Jettatura.

"*He* won't send for another dog to Bari," I thought as I took my way towards his lodging. "He would no more do so than Muffino would have sent to the antipodes for another man. Poor fellow! I fear he's but a lost soul now. I see it all before me—down and down and down he will go till he deserves the worse names they can give him, and all because they gave an ill name to a dog that gave him somebody to live for. Down to the dogs he will go,—“Pardon, signor—ten thousand pardons; no—ten thousand thrashings, I mean!” I exclaimed, on seeing that the man against whom I had run in my brown study was the gendarme. “Man—you are a murderer! You have slain a human soul!”

“I—I—I—Eccellenza—no—*Diaminé!*” he cried out. “How could I tell—who ever heard of a man——”

“Speak out—don't stand stammering and staring like a madman. What is it you want to say?”

“Eccellenza—pardon—I am going to San Gen-

naro—I must do penance for hanging a cur, Eccellenza—and——”

Whether La Jettatura was weak in the heart as well as in the head I know not. Though past forty I am not yet a physician. But this I know, that as soon as the breath had left Muffino's body, La Jettatura fell down in a swoon, and his pulse, once stopped, forgot to beat again. I have read many stories of dogs dying broken-hearted on human graves—why, then, should not the heart of a man break upon the grave of *his* master, of *his* friend, his only friend—though only a dog without a tail?

Basta!—It was just as well.

WASSAIL.

BY THE LATE COLONEL CHARLES HAMLEY.

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CHAPTER I.

IT was a cold night — a hard, clear Christmas night. The cold was everywhere. It was in the sky, clear as it was; it fell in the rays of the stars, bright as they were; it lay on the crisp frost which covered the fields, and in the rags and tatters of snow which hung from the bushes, making them look like iced scarecrows. It was a cold which you would set your teeth against, walk at, buffet with, perhaps swear at; but it was a cold which would not make you bear malice, like an east wind or damp sou'-wester. It was a cold, too, which, when yielding to the proper antidotes of warm fires and warm rooms, left rather a crisp, braced, pleasant feeling behind.

It had its own way at the Garland Ox. That famed public, as it stood with its bare stone

walls and unlit windows in the open sky, sheltered only by an old battered yew-tree and a hedge of blackthorn, seemed to offer as yet only a dogged resistance. The cold lay in layers of snow on the roof, meandered in little fretwork and imperfect cobwebs along the window-panes, had fallen in little heaps on the top of the signboard, and even bedabbled the figure of the noble animal represented thereon, giving him the appearance of having been snowballed, and taking away altogether the vernal and festive character which the garland of Lent lilies around his neck was supposed to impress. The fowls and animals had all covered under the sheds, and the path from the village was as yet silent and solitary, it being too early for the rustics to meet the cold for the sake of the cheer and revelry within. Inside, too, the cold held a sort of neutral ground. A single dip flickered on the table, showing dimly the outline of the large kitchen, though a row of brass candlesticks on the dresser, profusely adorned with holly and laurel, promised that by and by the tapers would glimmer fair. Christmas Eve was only in expectation at the Garland Ox. The fire was banked up with black coal, and the embers beneath glowed fitfully across the sanded floor, scarcely counteracting the chill from the frosted windows, though now and then shooting forth a light which revealed rows of pewters, clear and highly burnished, hanging from the shelves, and

occasionally darting into the depths of the bar, where casks stood, already tapped; and bottles of the vine-leaf design, bearing the labels rum, brandy, &c., and dangling nets of lemons, gave goodly promise of coming joviality.

Two individuals sat in the chimney-nook. One was mine host—just such as a host should be, according to the orthodox type, fat, ruddy, short necked, short-legged, and wheezy. He had gone through the grades of knife-boy and footman ere he attained the dignity of landlord; and a skilful anatomist might perhaps have discovered in his well-fleshed body the different strata belonging to each period. The other was a large and apparently young man, who lay lolling on a bench, and was so disguised by a loose dress, half-sailor, half-navvy, and by a fur cap drawn well over his face, that it was hard to see what he was. Between them the hostess—sharp, thin, weasel-like—bustled up and down, engaged in what she called righting the hearth. The opinion of the good Sarah Battle relative to a clear fire and a clean hearth is doubtless true and orthodox, though the process by which these are attained is as certainly very disturbing to the domestic economy. It seemed especially so in the present instance, as the broom in its sweeps invariably came in contact with mine host's fat legs, and the poker or tongs, or any other implement which required removal, took the same direc-

tion, so that he was obliged to be constantly drawing them up or hoisting them round, and sat in a state of harassing defensive warfare. He found little consolation in the stranger, who was silent and unsocial. The Garland Ox had made many overtures without effect, and he was not a man to force his conversation on any guest. At length the stranger began to smoke, and the fragrant fumes of his pipe overcame even the exclusiveness of the host, and forced him to break into colloquy.

"That's fine baccy of yours, sir."

The only reply was an outstretched arm with a hairy pouch in it. The Garland Ox accepted the proffer, filled and lit his pipe, puffed, gurgled, gyrated on his stool, choked and puffed again, but at each puff he seemed to abandon the attitude of hostile defence, and to regard all exterior circumstances, including even the eccentric movements of the broom and the flight of missiles, with a most benignant suavity. He was tasting cavendish for the first time.

After a while a loud shuffling of feet and hubbub of voices were heard in the passage.

"Here's the wassailers at last," said mine host, with a loud chuckle; "all the royal family, by Jove."

"Royal family! a pretty royal family," said his helpmate, with scorn—a set of idle vagabonds all them Dibbles; and a pretty mess they'll make on my sanded floor with their nasty dirty feet."

Presently the door opened, and in rushed twenty or more rough-looking men, some blowing the cold from them, some stamping it out on the floor, and some thrashing it off by beating their arms across their chests. Meantime their leader, with a dark wooden bowl under his arm, had pranced up playfully to the landlord of the Ox, and was shouting forth, in a nasal twang, "Wassail, wassail, a jolly wassail!"

"I thought, Kit," said the Garland Ox, "that 'twas agin your rules to begin wassail with a dry bowl."

"Or with a dry lip either," replied the wassailer; "so we'll commence proceedings with a drop of Christmas ale."

The hostess was just in her designation of "vagabonds." The seal of vagabondism was set on the whole party. It bore, perhaps, no visible sign, and yet was as plain as the horn on a rhinoceros. It was common to all. There were patriarch Dibbles, middle-aged Dibbles, and young Dibbles—large Dibbles, middle-sized Dibbles, and small Dibbles; yet all bore the same impress of vagabondism. They breathed it; they walked it; it lurked in every look and in every turn of their loose, shambling gait; vagabondism was evidently a nature hereditary to the Dibbles. There was another trait equally universal—that of ugliness. It was not, however, the scowling low-browed ugliness which

looks out garotte, burglary, and murder on the world; but a grotesque and comic ugliness, such as is seen on water-spouts and on the lion-heads of fountains. This ugliness maintained a general likeness throughout, yet had its flights and fancies, and indulged here and there in eccentric touches and variations. The leading feature of the Dibble physiognomy was the nose. In some it had the mangold-wurzel character — coarsely red, warty, and pitted; in some it was slightly fined down to the beetroot standard; in others it took more after the kidney-potato type; but however much toned down or modified, it was always sufficient to identify a Dibble. The other features were worthy of it. The eyes were small and piggy; the mouth large, with loose blubbery lips; the hair was of the lankest and the straightest, tallowy, and of a whitey-brown colour when not grizzled by age.

The costume, too, was based on general principles, though varied in detail. A greatcoat was the garment aimed at; and there were specimens exhibited, illustrative not only of different wardrobes, but of different generations. One Dibble had an upper benjamin fastened alternately by bows of tape and buttons; another had adapted the green plush shooting-jacket of a corpulent squire, which still bore one of its original mother-of-pearl buttons, hanging in unworthy association with others of horn and wood, assisted by an occa-

sional pin; a third was happy in the possession of a braided coat, short-waisted, long-skirted, after the fashion of the Regency; and as this was the most diminutive individual of the party, the garment reached from his neck to his heels, giving him the appearance of a gentleman in his dressing-gown who had made a hasty toilet.

An article of apparel still more common to all was the comforter. It had its variations: sometimes it was white with pink ends, sometimes white with green ends, sometimes of an honest brown; but a comforter enveloped every Dibble chin and touched every Dibble nose. It was evidently either the orthodox costume of a wassailer, or a distinctive badge of the race.

They are vagabonds, all these Dibbles. Yet with a vitality not unusual to vagabond races, they had lived, thrived in their way, and spread like the horse-radish, generation after generation, in the same locality, outlasting and outliving old Norman families and good old Saxon houses, just as the badger and fox survived their mammoth contemporaries. The Dibbles had appeared in the parish register century after century, generally occupying the same place and position—neither rising nor falling, hovering on pauperism, and coquetting with petty larceny, and only just skirting the workhouse and bridewell.

It was this pertinacity in multiplying, and this

adherence to place, which had gained them the nickname of the Royal Family.

This Royal Family was divided into several branches—there was the Unicorn, the Mermaid, the Beelzebub, and the Giant; and then the Mermaid had an offshoot, the Pretty Tommy, which had gained a distinctive appellation in consequence of having carried the Dibble physiognomy to the highest standard of development. These titles were a tradition—the *unde derivatur* was lost in obscurity.

The different houses acknowledged kinship, and formed a sort of oligarchy or union of royal tribes, one and indivisible, as our friends across the Channel would say. Sometimes circumstances would give one house a temporary predominance, but the old unity and equality were generally very soon restored. Young Kit, a scion of the Unicorns, seized with the ambition of becoming a landed proprietor, squatted on a dreary moor, known only to the snipe and the peewee, built a cob cottage, surrounded it with a garden, then enclosed a field about the size of a tablecloth, then added another and another tablecloth, until there had grown a tiny farm, which looked like an *al fresco* café with its boxes and compartments. A female member, too, about the same time, had set up in the fish, chowder, and apple-stall line, which gave a sort of commercial *éclat* to the house. The

Unicorn was now in the ascendant, but someway they soon lapsed to the old Dibble standard.

Pretty Tommy had his turn. Under the pressure of a warrant for poaching or affiliation, he had entered on board a man-of-war, and served as a deck-swapper in the battle of Algiers. On his return he was paraded by his party as a hero; and 'twas considered doubtful whether he or Lord Exmouth contributed most to the victory. After having appeared, however, several times in the stocks, and suffered other indignities from the hands of officials, the hero-worship waned, and he fell back on the usual privileges and dignities of a Dibble.

The Beelzebubs had a distinguished era, when their representative man was sexton of the parish for several years.

The Giants enjoyed the notoriety of possessing the most terrible witch in the neighbourhood.

The Royal Family had also its moral characteristics. It was a tradition and law with them never to work except as the alternative of starvation; and then the work chosen was always of a loose, vagabond kind, such as holding horses on fair and market days, lounging after sportsmen, carrying bills, or making brooms. Honest digging and delving was an abomination to them. Cleanliness and sanitary regulations were things also indignantly repudiated. A Dibble was supposed to live and die in utter innocence of cold water. Their homes were gener-

ally pitched amid gutters and dunghills ; and there the young Dibbles squattered and gambolled and grew strong in defiance of typhus and boards of health. To get a sop from another man's dish, and a sup from another man's cup, was also a royal maxim ; and there was a certain oiliness of tongue and wheedling manner peculiar to the members of all the houses, which was supposed to gain them access to larder and wardrobe, and be very effective in procuring broken victuals and cast-off raiment. A certain dry quaint humour, too, was known to be rewarded often by horns of ale and cider when hard-handed labour might go athirst. It was whispered, however, that the swains who took the daughters of the royal race to their hearts found that the oily voice could be pitched to a different key, and the wheedling manner raised to the imperiousness of a Zenobia.

Among other privileges, they claimed that of being the hereditary wassailers—the only true and orthodox ministrants of the jolly wassail. Filibusters had time after time attacked these rights, but had always met with signal discomfiture. The Dibbles were the high-priests of wassail.

With the wassailers had entered a thin wiry man, with a pinched, snipy face and a keen twinkling eye. A stoop in the back and a bend in the knees would have given the impression of decrepitude to those who had not seen him working a

cover or going across a country. He was dressed in a grey frock-coat, corduroy breeches and gaiters, and wore a broad-brimmed hat jammed well down over his forehead. There was a hunting-whip under his arm, and a pair of couples peeped from his pocket. He bore about with him a sense of dog—he was of dogs, doggy. This was Jim Seecombe, in turn kennel-keeper, whip, huntsman, dog-trainer, dog-breeder, dog-doctor—in fact, holding any office in the dog administration, and sometimes, like the Great Duke, concentrating them all in his own person.

“Halloa, James,” said the Garland Ox, “be you turned wassailer! I thoft none but the Royal Family had that privilege.”

“No, landlord,” replied James, “I han’t that honour, but perhaps when my old missus goes I may prowpose to one of the princesses, and shall then tail in somewhere in the chowrusses.”

“No, James,” said Kit the Unicorn, “we doesn’t give or be given in marriage so easily. We must see the Peditree or the Jenny-Loggy, as the pason calls it, of a party before we takes un into our family.”

“A queer Peditree Jim would show, I thinks,” said the Beelzebub, who was evidently the bitter spirit of the race; “for them does say as how old Tom the huntsman found un wrapt up in a ’oss-cloth in the kennel, and the Squire said such a

com-by-chance was a real drowit of the kennel, and so kept un there."

"Well, William," retorted Jim, "a kennel is as good a place to be born in as a garret, and good dowgs I hould to be better company than bad 'umans."

"Just so," rejoined Kit; "but we'rn an ould family, Jim, and can't take no com-by-chances—we'rn an ould family."

"You comed over with the Conqueror, I s'pose; all the ould families comed with him. Old Mrs St Turnup says to me the other day, 'James,' says she, 'them fellows ought to pay me more respect, for the first St Turnup came over with the Conqueror, you know.' 'Yes, ma'am,' says I; and thinks I to myself, what a lot of shoeblacks and sich cattle comed over with that 'ere Conqueror."

"I don't knows nothing about Conquerors," rejoined Kit, "but we'rn an ould family—we haven't knowed many ups and downs—'tis as we was so we is, I thinks: we haven't changed much back'ards or for'ards, up'ards or down'ards; sometimes we hae a leek to our broth and sometimes we han't; sometimes we hae no puddin' to our flesh, sometimes no flesh to our puddin', and sometimes neyther one nor t'other; but here we've been for years upon years, and here we be still."

"Increasing and multiplying, bless the Lord," snuffled old Beelzebub, who was a rigid Brianite.

"And you han't falled off in the breed, nayther," said Jim, pointing to the youngest scion of the Pretty Tommy branch.

"Ay," said old Kit, patting young Pretty Tommy admiringly on the head, "he's a pretty cheeld, and a raal Dibble."

There was certainly little doubt of the paternity, and no one would have questioned his legitimacy. This youth, like other rising characters, had to contend with the fame of a great father. It had always been prophesied of him that he never could rival that parent in personal appearance, but he had falsified all the predictions by achieving what was allowed to be the *ne plus ultra* of Dibble beauty. All the features were in him exaggerated—the lips were more blubbery, the nose was turned up, the hair was more lank, and whiter, if possible, and hung on his head like the thatch of a dishevelled beehive. He had evidently, too, come in for the fag-end of the stage properties, and instead of being allotted a greatcoat, was attired in a blue dress-coat which came down over his hips, the tails hanging about his heels. He seemed to be very much flustered at the public notice he had attracted, and resented all the attempts to bring him forward with pokes of the elbow and abortive kicks.

"Ah," said old Kit, apologetically, "'tis the first time with un, and he is shy before company."

"And where be you a-going to spend your Christmas, Jim?" said the Garland Ox to the huntsman.

"Well, I've been axed to go to Tregarrow faarm, and I think one might go further and fare wus."

"You're right, Jim," chimed in old Kit, "no better than Tregarrow for Christmas cheer, but I thoft you was in disgrace there, and that he han't forgive you for being a 'complice of "chuck sheep," as he called it."

"What's that, Kit?" called out the Ox, chuckling in anticipation of a story.

"Oh, you know, the hounds was a-passing through Faarmer Penrice's fields, when one of un, old Blackcap, was seed to chuck two sheep. The faarmer was in a cruel way, and stormed and cussed, and the Squire says very quietly, 'Will we gie un a Halgave trial? we'll hang un first and then try un after'ards.' So there was a gallows rose, and Jim was Jack Ketch, and ould Blackcap was left a-hanging. Pursently there was a fine bust, and the pack was going like mad across the thirty acres, when the Squire sings out, 'Why, dang it, there's ould Blackcap leading!' and there he wos, sartain enough. So the faarmer always swore Jim had tied the rope loose, or had gun back and cut un down."

"It's the missus favours James," remarked the mate of the Garland Ox, "'cause of young Maister Tom."

"I thoft, marm," observed old Kit, "that the faarmer didn't approve of Maister Tom's 'sociates, and wouldn't see none of um."

"Yes, the faarmer may talk and bark, but he loveth in his heart anything that young Maister Tom liked, though good to know he've a right to hate 'em all—all them idle scamping fellows, who go about the country leading young men astray with their sporting, and their drinking, and their betting. There was young Harry Rankin—a pretty end he come to, a-carrying off young Miss Emily, and then leaving her, and nearly breaking the poor passon's heart. He were anither of your favourites, James."

"I beg your parding, marm," replied Jim, indignantly; "there were a great difference 'twixt he and Maister Tom. A good sportsman, marm, may be a good man, and a man may be a bad un, marm, without sporting. Men drink, marm, and gamble, marm, and run away with young garls, marm, who was never a sportsman, and never knowed nothing about a oss or a doog. Maister Tom was a true man, jist a little hot and full-blooded; so he and the faarmer quarled, and he tuk off to try his luck; but he'll turn up all right yet, marm."

"Well, but, James, you were always a-praising that young good-for-nothing Rankin."

"No, marm; I said he were a pretty man in the

field, but I never tuk to un as I did to Maister Tom. I've seed un kick his doogs, and I've seed his osses shake when he com'd into the stable, and I've said to myself, 'A man wot ill-treats them doomb things isn't the man for me.' I've seed un after a hunt sit down a-drinking in the publices with all them low fellars, and I never 'spects a gentleman wot demeans hisself that way. Maister Tom never did that—he were another sort. The faarmer calls un a pordigal. Pordigal or no pordigal, he'll show hisself a true man yet, and we shall see un at Tregarrow once more, hearty as ever, and better p'rhaps for a little trial, marm."

Jim then took up his can, and, noddin round to the company, took a last sup with "A merry Christmas when it comes," then jammed his hat more than ever over his eyes, and slouched out.

During the latter part of the conversation the stranger turned once or twice on his bench so as to hear better without being more seen.

"Well, Kit," said the Ox, "what's your beat to-night?"

"Oh, landlord, we shall jist take one or two of the ginty in the village, and then go on to the passonage, and finish up, you know, at Tregarrow faarm, as there's nobody at the Hall now. The faarmer never will have us, you know, till it strike twelve. But we must be a-mixing for the bowl, so bring the materials, if you please, landlord."

These were soon forthcoming — ale, spice, a slight dash of cognac, and roasted apples. All of the Royal Family now congregated round the bowl, and were busy in compounding the wassail-cup. From the variety of tastes, and the variety of advice given, it was evidently not an easy matter. If too many cooks spoil the broth, too many advisers seemed more unfavourable still to the happy production of the wassail beverage. Every adviser, too, was a taster; and as every opinion was tested by a sip, the bowl soon was at a low ebb. The ceremony seemed endless. It was like the old story of ladling out a pool with a limpet shell which had a hole in the bottom. Whilst the committee of taste were still engaged in controversy and trials, the stranger had risen from the bench, and, approaching old Kit, touched him on the shoulder, and beckoned him into a corner. There a very earnest conference took place, and a chink of money might have been heard. At last old Kit, by sundry coughs and hems, and becks and nods, summoned the other heads of houses together. When the conclave was duly formed, Kit formally opened the debate. "Now you see, brother wassailers, this 'ere young man is very anxious to join our company to-night."

"Is he a Dibble?" said one patriarch. The stranger confessed that he was not sprung from that distinguished race.

"Be he married to a Dibble?" said another. The stranger also disclaimed this honour.

"No," said Kit, "he ben't connected wi' us at all, but he've behave very handsome [chinking the coins in his hand significantly], and says he wull pay all the expenses of the boul. P'rhaps he be a young chap belonging to one of them chowrus societies, or p'rhaps [lowering his voice] he be some young gemman out on a spree."

The argument seemed to convince the heads of houses, as they gave their assent, with the proviso that it was not to be considered as a precedent, or as in any way to derogate from the rights and privileges of the Dibbles to be the exclusive wassailers.

"Now then, comrade," says Kit, "what shall we call thee?"

"Oh, anything," responded the stranger; "Sailor Dick, if you like."

"Well then, Sailor Dick, come along—we must be moving; and be that your doog, making so bould?" pointing to a grey wolfish-looking animal which lay at the stranger's feet.

"Oh yes, he is mine; but he's very quiet, is old Dingo, and will obey orders."

The bowl being now satisfactorily filled, and young Pretty Tommy as the neophyte being charged with carrying a can containing materials for replenishing it, the whole party started forth

trolling out the burden of their chorus, "Wassail, wassail, a jolly wassail!"

As they moved on, a female figure started from behind the wall, but so silently and so stealthily that it might have been a spirit; and none saw, none heard her, as she followed quickly in their track.

CHAPTER II.

The cold, too, had taken possession of the vicarage of St Maddock, fenced in as it was by a quadrangle of wall, hedge, and trees. The row of poplars in front looked like the white plumes of a hearse in their snowy drapery, but the laurel and their kin had made an effort to cast it off and assert a Christmas greenness. The walks were hidden, but there were evidences of attempts at prettiness in flower-beds and in creepers trellissed on the wall and over the porch. Neglect, however, was apparent everywhere. Shrubberies had become wildernesses—luxuriance had grown into rankness—the training hand was evidently absent. The house was of that square kind which seemed to have been selected as the model of parsonage architecture at that time. There was a porch in the middle, and a square small sitting-room on either side. This style could have been invented only with the malignant intent, that the man who

was doomed to meet everything that was mean and repulsive in his visits and daily ministrations, should not have the power of refreshing himself by the presence of beauty in his own home. We enter one of these square parlours; it is perhaps sparsely furnished, but the furniture had been costly, though dingy now rather from neglect than use. There was here also a general look of neglect, a general want of neatness and order. Books lay about in every direction on the table, on chairs, on the hair sofa, and against one another in a *degagée* manner on the shelves. There is only one ornament—a picture over the chimney-piece of a female face, almost angelic in its beauty.

In a large leathern chair by the fire sits Arthur Versturme, vicar. He may be middle-aged, but there is a worn look, which perhaps makes him older. The chest is narrowed and the shoulders stoop—the delicate finely-cut features are wan and shrunk—the eyes and cheeks sunk—the forehead, high and narrow, is clear and smooth, though very bare now, and the few silky locks which fall over it are fast turning grey. There is a shadow lying on the face and over the whole man—the shadow of a sorrow; and there is an expression which speaks of one who is enduring an affliction which he knows to be a chastisement, and recognises in his trial the hand of God.

On the hearth stand two other persons—the one

near him is the very opposite of himself. It is Guy Penrice, Yeoman. He is very fond of that title Yeoman—as proud of it as any earl-marshal would be of his, and as particular in writing it after his name as any offshoot of nobility could be in prefixing Hon. to his. It would have figured largely on his visiting-cards, if he had descended to such things. It always appeared in large firm letters in public documents and signatures; was very patent in all the entries in parish registers; showed out in vivid paint on all his carts, waggons, and carriages; and was, in fact, written and posted wherever he could do it. It was his pride, too, to stamp “Yeoman” on his life, manners, habits, and dress. There were certain things which he believed incumbent on a yeoman, and he always acted in character. He insisted on very primeval hours for his meals, and would always take them in the kitchen or hall, at the same table with his servants and farm-labourers. For retirement he went to the hearth, where a large chair was always reserved for him. He had always an open house and a table spread, so that any wayfarer might get his horn of cider and crust of bread-and-cheese. Tramps and vagabonds wouldn’t come for such small matters, he used to say, but some poor foot-sore fellow might be glad of a rest, and a bellyful to set him on.

He could rarely be induced to enter the parlour

or his dame's bowdoyre, as he called it, and had a strong objection to all exclusive parties. His idea of sociality was best represented in harvest-homes, and all the regular farm-feasts. He had a maxim, too, that a farmer should work with his men, and not come now and then to look on like a gentleman. Guy Penrice had a strong objection to learning, or rather to the classics, or Latten, as he called it, which he believed had been the ruin of many a good farmer; and was very dogged, too, in recognising improvements, or any of the experiments in model farming. He didn't take to new-fangled ideas, not he; he liked to farm as his fathers had done, and he didn't see how Tregarrow could be made to yield more than it did. His ideas of dress were peculiar, and he plagued his dame so much on this subject, that, had they lived in these days of crinoline, his conduct would have constituted a charge of cruelty and tyranny before Sir Cresswell Cresswell, Knight. It was his maxim generally that yeomen should keep distinct from the gentry, and shouldn't try to ape their fashions and ways. He carried this into exaggeration—so far, indeed, as to affect the patois or dialect of the peasant in his talk.

A stout, sturdy, large man was Guy Penrice. He stood five feet ten, by how much across 'twere hard to say. Bloated and corpulent he might have been, for good living and prosperity had told

upon him, except that constant exercise and exposure had toned down what would have been redness to a bright healthy brown ruddiness, wholesome and pleasant to look at, and had hardened his bulk into a robustness and firmness quite free from the offence of obesity. As Guy Penrice was dressed now, so was he always dressed—morning and evening, Sunday and workday, a-field and at home, at church and at market, at fair or at festival. He may have relaxed from the rigour of his costume and descended to a deshabelle in the privacy of his hearth, but no one beyond the privileged circle ever knew that he yielded such a small point as his boots even to the amenities of life.

His invariable habiliments were a blue coat of the stoutest Saxony, very broad in the skirts, and very full everywhere; the buttons always metal, more or less bright according to the wear; a waistcoat of the same pattern; brown corduroy breeches, and brown-topped boots. There was always a lucid interval of shirt betwixt the waistcoat and breeches; whether this was to suit the convenience or taste of the wearer, or whether there was a sort of border feud between these garments which prevented their meeting on an amicable footing, was a secret of the toilet. The breeches and boots were on the same distant terms, and had a good neutral ground of calf and grey stocking.

Such was Guy Penrice, Yeoman, a man who

farmed more acres, and represented more cubic inches, than any one of his class in the neighbourhood. His compeers looked upon him as a magnate, and the squirearchy as a good type of a good class. He was a character even in those times. He had many virtues and many prejudices, and they were so oddly mixed that the virtues ran into the prejudices, and the prejudices into the virtues; and when you lighted on one, you found yourself treading close on the other. The virtues, however, had the best of it, and a warm heart shed a halo even over the prejudices.

His manliness, independence, hospitality, and the extent of his farms, gained him the name of King of the Farmers—a title of which he was very proud; and he used to say triumphantly, "Better to be King of the Farmers than to come in at the tail-end of the squires."

He was a character then, he would be a curiosity now. Men would discuss him—speculate, perhaps lecture on him. His species just lived into the utilitarian period, and left a few skeletons to prove their existence, and then passed away.

The other visitor was the curate, Jones: tall, stout, and ruddy, he seemed a disciple of the muscular Christianity. He was, however, evidently raw and new—strange especially to the life and people amid whom he had been cast. As far as general sympathies and knowledge of character-

istics went, with his Cockney breeding he might as well have been sent on a mission to the Ashantees or Caffres. He was, however, going manfully and heartfully at his work, and was making way.

Guy Penrice was standing, having received preliminary warning from several chairs that they were not up to his weight—standing, as he always stood, as though he were standing up against a stiff wind, a wrong, a newfangled idea, or some antagonist of that kind. He had evidently been enforcing some proposition, and the vicar was answering now in a quiet, melancholy tone. As Arthur Versturme spoke, the shade of his sorrow seemed to close and deepen over him.

“No, Penrice, no, my friend, it cannot be. ’Tis kindly meant, but I could not join your merry-making. A man so stricken is not fit for the house of feasting. I am better alone with myself and my sorrow. This, too, is the day when my affliction fell on me, when she left my hearth—she, the daughter of my love and my life-long care—and I always keep it as a day of humiliation and prayer.”

“Well, passon, I am sorry for it. The damo would be cruel glad to see you at our merrymaking—so would Lily, and everybody; and ’twould do ye good, I think. Merry hearts lighten a heavy one, they say, and I don’t see no use myself in putting one’s skeleton in a cupboard—it does good

to air 'em sometimes. I've had my trouble, you know—that pordigal Tom going away and leaving me in my old age, just as he was getting such a capital faarmer. It broke my heart almost"—(judging from the yeoman's appearance, heart-breaking did not seem a very wasting disease)—"but it eases me to talk it over sometimes."

"Yes, Penrice, men are differently constituted; it may do you good, and doubtless does, to publish your wrong, and discuss it, and gather sympathies on it, but such things would kill me. God knows that I do not hide my skeleton, but I cannot parade it before men. I place it fairly before me on the hearth, and face it manfully, though humbly. Ever and anon I look up to the angelic face above, and think what light and joy she once cast on this hearth, and then feel that I ought, hard as it is, to bear submissively the darkness which has now been cast upon it. Besides, our cases are different. Yours is a trial, but it bears no disgrace. Your home is left desolate—mine is both desolate and disgraced."

"Well, I don't know about disgrace," mumbled the yeoman, evidently half-ashamed of his doubt. "Who knows what that pordigal may be doing in they furrin parts, or what ill ways he may be led to?"

"That's forecasting evil. I don't think your apprehensions are just, and I trust the days may be

few ere I see your hand joined in your son's in happy reconciliation. I cannot be with you to-night. I must keep solemn tryste here—my soul with my God. But perhaps," said he, after a pause, "Jones would like to join your merrymaking; it would be a good opportunity for him to see something of the people among whom he at present labours."

"Well, Mr Jones shall be welcome," replied the yeoman. "We'll gie un a hearty welcome; but you know my rule on wassail night—open house, open doors to high and low, rich and poor; we don't send out to the highways and byways, but all come who wish to come, and all for that night are alike."

"Our mission, my friend," said the vicar, "is to all—high or low, without distinction of class; and it will do Jones good to see such a gathering—it will give him an insight into the habits of his flock, and perhaps give him also a lesson or two how to appeal to their hearts and heads."

"Well, then, come along, Mr Jones, and we'll show you what we calls a jolly wassail."

The curate assented noway reluctant, and seemed rather eager in his acceptance of the invitation.

As they left the house the yeoman turned and said—

"No offence, passon—no offence at what I have said."

"Offence!—from you, too, at whose hands I have received so many benefits: no, no, my friend; God's blessing rest on you and on your hearth this night, and ever."

The vicar watched their retreating figures for a while, and then turned to keep his sad vigil by his own lone hearth.

CHAPTER III.

It was a common sorrow which had stricken Arthur Versturme—a very common sorrow—one of the commonest which befalls humanity. It was a sorrow which had scarred hearts and darkened hearths throughout all the generations of men. Yet this commonness took not from its terrible-ness. It is not catastrophes only which crush and deaden. Every great sorrow is a catastrophe to him on whom it falls.

When Arthur Versturme arose one Christmas morn and found that the daughter of his love had flown and left his hearth desolate and dishonoured, it was as much a catastrophe as though a thunder-bolt had struck, or a lightning flash scathed him—as though a flood had swept through his house, or an earthquake shaken it into ruins. Oh! he must bear up, and not give way so. Had not Lord Highmount and poor John Smith suffered the same?

What was this to him? Was his heart to be healed because another was sorely smitten? Was his hearth to be brighter because another's was dark and clouded? He could not accept such commonplace consolations, nor could he find relief in publishing his grief. He could not wear his sackcloth outside, nor could he sit at the corners of streets with ashes on his head. So the sorrow ate into his life—made his bread bitter, took the savour from his salt, and shaded even the pages of nature and mind which he had so loved to read. He knew this sorrow was a sin, and it was only when, standing the smitten before the smiter, he could say, "Lord, thy will be done," that his burden grew lighter and his soul less dark.

Four-and-twenty years before Arthur Versturme had come to St Maddoc's as the new vicar, bringing with him a young wife, very lovely, very graceful, but so delicate and fragile that she seemed quite out of place in the rough home and strange world in which her lot was cast. It was, indeed, a strange new world to both—new in the ideas, habits, and feelings which belonged to its life. He had spent much of his time at college, and then travelled as tutor to a young nobleman—had returned with him, and had met, during his visits at the family mansion, a young lady, whose beauty and gentleness had at once won his heart; and, without much thought or consideration for the future, he had married her.

She was a relation—a poor relation, indeed—of the noble family, but still had been brought up in all the luxury and refinement of a lordly home, and knew of poverty only as an abstract thing which she must some day encounter. The vicarage of St Maddoc was her dowry. Hither they had come these two, to live and labour among people and things so ungenial, so different from all their former experiences and associations. It was hard uphill work at first, but they had much faith in the future, much love for one another. It was perhaps the most difficult position in which they could have been placed. The parishioners consisted almost entirely of yeomen and sturdy well-to-do farmers, who are always a class jealous of condescending, and fearful of appearing to court notice from those who may claim to be above them, and will keep aloof from a feeling of sturdy independence, which has, however, often the appearance of churlishness or discourtesy. There were few rich in his congregation, and very few poor. With the rich he might have been at home—with the poor he might have used conciliation; but conciliation with these yeomen would have been resented as condescension, and any attempt at sociability have been suspected as contraband patronage. After a time, however, passages of mutual kindness and sympathy brought the pastor and his flock more together. Sick-beds, death-beds, suffering, pastoral ministrations, made

them feel more akin. The devotion of the vicar, too, in attending on the sick poor during a severe typhus, won him the championship of Guy Penrice, and where he led, others were sure to follow. The yeoman class are very much given to extremes; and they were as warm now in their friendship, and as earnest in their kind offices, as they had before been cold and distant. The vicar and his family were flooded now with hospitalities of every kind. Milk and cream came in such quantities that he might have set up as retail dairyman; and there were ever chickens, home-made cakes, honey, and fruit, and flowers coming from the different farms for the delicate lady. Arthur Versturme would have been happy enough: he was getting well harnessed to his work; the magnates of the congregation gave him cordial help; the people were beginning to understand him, or rather he was beginning to understand the people better; his home, too, wore an aspect of beauty under the auspices of the young wife and her society; the fireside talks and readings, the summer rambles with her, gave the all of recreation or refinement which he cared for. She, too, was happy—content, very content; never complained, and perhaps never felt sensible of complaint; yet it was evident that, like a transplanted exotic, she was unconsciously feeling the external influences, and pining for native air and native life.

She did not knowingly crave for the elegancies and refinements of a former time, but her nature missed them : they had become accessories of being to her. And so, day after day, the strange life and the harsh cold climate began to shed a change over her—very slow it was, but to the practised eye it was also very sure ; and then a child, a daughter, was born unto them, and she would fain have lived on in that young life ; but it was too late. The silver cord was too much loosed ; the spring of life was broken. For some months she lingered, but each day was a stage towards the end. She was

“ Wearing awa’ like a snaw-wreath in the thaw ”—

melting away gently and softly ; and one morn—a summer morn—her spirit glided away without a sign, without a sigh. When the sun had arisen, Arthur Versturme had lost a wife, and the angels had gained a sister. A stricken man was Arthur Versturme. Sympathy was poured upon him, but he refused to be comforted. Then old Guy Penrice said, “ Leave un alone ; leave un to hisself, and he’ll come round quicker, and the dame will take the cheild.” So they left him to himself, and the dame took the child under her kindly nurture. When she thought that the fit time for his mourning was over, she brought his daughter, and, placing her on the hearth before him, bade him rise up and see that there were other duties before him. And he did rise up,

washed, ate bread, was comforted, and entered again on the path of life, a sadder, perhaps, but not an unhappy man.

The child was now all in all to him, and he devoted himself to her care and training. Of course he made many mistakes, as all theorists and book-men do when they undertake the culture of real flesh and blood, mind and passions; yet still the young nature grew sweetly beside his own. As years went on, and he began to enter on the teaching, Dame Penrice often, when she saw the child grow thin or pale, and knew that learning was going too far, would rush in, seize the young Emily, and carry her off to the farm, there to undergo the discipline of new milk, brown bread, early hours, no lessons, and romps in the hay-field. He was the teacher, the trainer, but was glad and eager to accept the aid offered by the squire's governess in the accomplishments and lighter branches. Thus, in this triune pupilage, young Emily grew up healthy, cheerful, and intelligent, inheriting much of her mother's beauty, though hers was less delicate, less spiritual—not inheriting the mother's softness, for there were often symptoms of waywardness and a strong will, which would cast a shade over the father's face. She was an only child, however, and it was natural to expect this; but it would grow out of her as her nature developed itself. So he took comfort.

Just as she had entered on her maidenhood, and was standing

"Where the brook and river meet
Womanhood and childhood fleet,"

the idea seems to fix itself upon him that this child was utterly unprovided for, and that, should he be stricken of God—be carried off by one of those virulent fevers amid which he was constantly moving—she would be left poor and friendless to battle with the world. This idea grew within him until it became a trouble. Ever was he debating with himself how this provision might be made. Had he not gifts—large gifts—God-bestowed gifts? and might they not now be turned to account? Surely it was a sin not to use them! First his thoughts turned to literature; but a short trial soon proved to him that his talents and studies had not fitted him for popular literature, and none other he knew would be remunerative. A treatise on the Greek drama, or the root of a Greek verb, would not win a dower for the child of his love. Then he be-thought him of the initiatory work of his life, tutorship. Plenty of leisure, plenty of room were his, and here, too, he would be at home, working with congenial elements; and his spirit lighted up at the thought of once more entering on the fields of the classics. His purpose, once made known, met with eager encouragement; his well-known scholar-

ship and character afforded an opportunity too desirable to be overlooked. He had soon pupils enough. Even old yeoman Penrice was induced to send his boy, "jist," as he said, "to give the passon a lift, tho' he misdoubted that Latten, and knowed no good would ever come of it."

These were happy times now with Arthur Versturme. His vocation was congenial; he felt, too, that his talent was not buried in a napkin, but brought forth to make other talents. The child of his love, too, was by his side sharing his studies. The days were fair then—fair indeed; for now that the old tastes were resumed, he could not resist the temptation of bringing the young mind on with his, initiating it into the beauties which had once been the charm of his life; and it was seen how his eye brightened, and what an unction there was in his tone, as he read the favourite passages to her. She too entered into the readings with zest, though it was doubtful whether they were good or not, as they brought her so much into contact with the boy-classes, and that gave a masculine and independent tone to her character, which perhaps had much to do with the future.

The chief among the scholars—chief in years as well as in prominence—was young Harry Rankin. He was an orphan, and had just succeeded as heir to an old uncle. His family stood in that debatable ground where it rests with the man himself

whether he will rise up higher or descend to the lower place. This lad was the sort of fellow who is always popular. His popularity was what the philosophers would call nowadays muscular popularity. His character had that manly strong cast, overlaid with bright, brilliant colouring, which always attracts those who care not to seek the effects of tints and shades. His beauty was of the same manly tone—bright eyes, bright colour, rich bright hair, a strong but musical voice, a figure large and muscular, yet elastic, all made up a beauty which is sure to please the eye of man and woman. He had, too, a certain frankness of manner and an apparently reckless generosity; and when are these things not popular? Selfishness will often find this frankness and this generosity a good investment, and use them accordingly. Whether real or feigned, they were certainly with him a good investment, and brought in fine returns in popularity and influence. He had a certain courage too, though it was more the courage which springs from the assurance of strength and power, than that high-bred, high-souled courage which is a nature, and depends not on muscularity. His abilities, too, were fair, and his taste was vivid and warm, though perhaps not over-refined. He had, above all things, the faculty of making the most of his gifts, and poor old Tom Penrice, with all his pluck and strength, never came in anything more than a bad second.

Such as he was, he exercised a wondrous fascination on all around him. Two only seemed proof against it. The vicar and the yeoman. The vicar, spite of himself, felt repelled from him, and shrank from his attraction as from the rattle of a snake.

The yeoman was more open and pronounced in his impressions. "He's faalse, that youngster, depend on it—he's faalse, and there is nothing foreright about un."

Over none was this fascination greater than over Emily. She did not conceal her partiality, but would always refer to him in her studies, keep by him in their walks and rambles, sing with him at night, and sit beside him in the evenings when the vicar read to them, from the English classics, extracts which his fine taste had selected. The father saw this growing feeling—saw it with a vague apprehension of evil, and yet knew not how to check it. Thus the years passed on, and the boys were advancing into manhood. The guardians of young Rankin now recommended that he should travel, go forth and see the world before entering on his inheritance. So farewells were to be said. No word was spoken—no engagement made—no troth plighted; and yet Harry and Emily parted with the silent understanding of lovers. The separation was a relief to the vicar, though he saw with regret that the influence of the lover seemed not to wane with absence.

The time for his return came; he was of age; was to take possession; and the event was to be celebrated with great *éclat*. Many thought him improved, others declared that he had been only vulgarised and made more knowing by his contact with the world. Emily would see nought but increased attraction in her lover. The intimacy between them was renewed with all of, or perhaps more than, the old warmth, and at last the vicar, wrought upon by their importunity and by his tenderness for his child, reluctantly consented to their betrothal. So things stood. Young Harry now started forth into life with a great dash, playing the part of the young heir, though perhaps not going beyond what might be allowed to young blood and strong healthful impulses. After a while, however, it was seen that the gentlemen and the better class of his associates began to keep aloof, repelled by his braggart manner and ostentatious style of life. Still he was a popular man, kept a liberal establishment, set up tandem and hounds, and startled the neighbourhood by his daring driving, feats of horsemanship, and profuse hospitality. Then rumours floated about of midnight riot and excess at Lawton House. The vicar remonstrated; his remonstrance was met with respect—deference. A change was promised, and a change was made. There was more decorum at Lawton, and no more stories of riot were heard.

To be sure, Rankin was often absent for days together, and it was whispered that he then carried on his orgies in a distant town. This, however, was surmise, and the vicar was too guileless to suspect such things. The year of probation which he had insisted upon was drawing to its close, and his heart grew sorrowful as he saw months melting into weeks. The day was now very near, when one afternoon Arthur Versturme was summoned to attend a young girl in the village who was dying, and there by that death-bed the name of Harry Rankin fell on his ear with such a revelation of falsehood, treachery, and betrayal, as curdled his blood, and made his soul shrink within him. As he left that death-scene, his anger was still hot, though softened by thanksgiving at his own escape.

"And this man was to have been my daughter's husband! thank God for the deliverance—thank God," he uttered again and again, as he wended his way homewards. He had reached his gate, and there, standing by the open window, with his arm around his daughter's waist and his hand playing with her curls, was he, the liar, the traitor, the seducer. His wrath was again kindled at the sight. He stepped forth, and there and then denounced him with a vehemence and an indignation which cowed even Emily. Her lover cowered beneath his words, and slunk, without protest or

vindication, over the threshold which he had been forbidden again to cross.

When the first agitation was over, the vicar sought by every means, by reasoning and by tenderness, to soften the blow to Emily. She seemed to bear it with a passive and rather sullen resignation. She neither accepted nor rejected the consolations offered. Months even had passed, and no symptoms of communication betwixt them were seen; so the vicar thought fondly that in time all would be well. A fearful contradiction met him on the Christmas morn.

He came down expecting to receive his Christmas greeting, and give his Christmas blessing. There was no greeting for him, and instead of blessing was a curse. He came down to find his hearth desolate, and darkened by the spot of shame.

The child of his love had left her home, and fled without word or line—none knew whither—all, however, guessed with whom. Rankin disappeared at the same time, and it was known that for some time he had been realising his property and preparing for flight.

This was Arthur Versturme's sorrow—it was a common sorrow. It was an old story, yet terribly new to those who had to act the old parts in it.

CHAPTER IV.

"And that was how Tom and I comed to quarl," said old yeoman Penrice, who had been telling the story in his own circumlocutory way to his companion, and had now brought down the narrative to his own wrongs.

"Your son did not assist in the abduction, surely?" said the curate.

"No, no," replied the yeoman, vehemently; "he was too honest for that, was Tom. If he had done such a thing, I wud have disinherited un then and there, if there hadn't been another creature of the name of Penrice on the face of the arth. He was too honourable for that, was Tom. No, 'twas all along of that 'ere Harry Rankin. That fellow had such power over un that he could wheedle un into anything, and slock un anywhere; and they wus allays a-coosing about the country, hunting and shooting and badger-baiting, and all kinds of sport and frolic. Tom, to be sure, didn't join in any of the racketing, and rioting, and chorowsing. He hadn't no turn for that. But he was a-getting uncommon onsettled and onsteady; and there wus many an ill word spoke betwixt us then. In coose things got worse. He said I was al'ays a-nagging at un, and I said he wus al'ays a-aggravating me by his doings. I was very onhappy, and so was Tom. But he wus cruel, wilfil, and wouldn't gie

up that Rankin, and I wus so angered by the goings-on that I couldn't bear the sight ov un, and wouldn't allow un a-nist my doors. So hot blood got ill blood, and Tom and me never met but to quarl. And then come that elopement and throwed all the fat in th' fire. I couldn't help a-taunting un wi' his friend, and he wus ashamed to uphold un any longer, and so used to get cruel vexed with hisself, and almost wild wi' me.

"At last he comed up to me one day, in his manly, foreright way, and says, 'Fayther,' says he, 'we'rn going on in a very bad way, and no good 'll come of it. I shall be drove to do something desperate, or take to bad courses, and then we shall repent it all our lives. So I've been thinking, fayther, that we had better part for a bit. I'm of age, and can take up that money old granfaar left me, and go out to see something of the world, and when I come back, things will have been forgotten, and we shall go on as hearty as we used to. So, give me your blessing, fayther, and I'll go.' 'No,' says I, for I was awful cussed in heart that day, 'I won't give no blessing to any pordigal who goeth from his fayther's house to spend his substance in riotous living.' 'There will be no rioting,' says he; 'so shake hands then, and let us part friends.' So we shook hands and parted; but I didn't think he was meaning it really. However, he wasn't at breakfast next morning, but I wus too

proud to ask for un ; and he didn't come to dinner, and I saw the dame's eyes wus red, and then I knowed he was gone. Many a night have I wished that I had gived un the blessing."

"And have you not heard from him since?" said the curate.

"Oh, yes, we heard from un, or ov un. He went to 'Stralia—they all goes there—and had took to sheep-farming, and was doing brave, and had a very fine prospect. But who knows in that outlandish place what may come? He may go to the bad any day, or catch the fever, or be murdered by them blackamoor fellows, and I shall be left in my old age without chick or chield."

"Not childless, surely," said the curate ; "I saw a young lady in your pew who I thought was your daughter."

"No, no," said the yeoman, with a chuckle, "that wus Lily, as we call her. She don't belong to our breed, and don't favour our people a bit, do she?"

The curate thought, as he called up the memory of the sweet delicate face which had made him read the wrong lesson and stammer in his text, and then looked down on the hard, rough countenance of the old yeoman, that kinship would scarcely be established by a family likeness.

"No, she was a com-by-chance—a godsend, my dame says. I call her my legacy—a pretty legacy, wosn't it?"

The curate thought that one might have worse bequests made him.

"'Tis a curious story how we com by her; my dame says that I tell it to everybody."

The curate suggested that there was no reason why he should be an exception.

"It wos the romance of my life," continued the yeoman. "The passon used to say that every life had a bit of romance some time or other—his was a dark bit, poor dear!"

"Yours," remarked the curate, "seems to have brought happier consequences."

"Yes, mine have done me good—have made life more pleasant and more lightsome like. The legacy have sartainly give a sort of colour and a movement to it. But for her, I should have gone on in the regular faarmer way, sowing and reaping, and garnering, toiling, and eating, and sleeping; but she have took us out of that, and made us shake hands with the world outside the church town. 'Tis a good long story too, and I al'ays like to begin at the beginning, and go right through; but 'tis a brave step to the faarm yet—so this is my romance.

"About the time I was married, and fust comed into the faarm, there was a young fellow called George Carthew, who used to come and go at the Hall. He was a nephy or ward of the squire's, as fine-hearted and merry a lad as ever I seed—with sich a spirit, too, and as gay as a lark. I was a

smartish chap then, and uncommon fond of sporting, though I was never such a good sportsman as that pordigal Tom. Well, George used to come over to the faarm for the pathridge-shooting, and took wonderful to me; and if the squire's family was away, he wud come and spend his holidays with me; and how he did enjoy hisself, and how he wud work at har'est, and how he wud sing and dance with the maidens at har'est-home! We was cruel fond ov un, the dame especially, and he was al'ays uncommon welcome at Tregarrow. After a year or two he went to larn to be a lawyer or counsellor at a place they call the Temple, but used still com now and then to get a breath of the country, and blow the smell of the Thames out ov his nostrils, as he said.

"One day, when 'twos wet, I took it into my head to look over my deeds and papers, and thoft that there was something wrong about one ov 'em. This made me very oneasy, and I cudn't get it off my mind; so I says to the dame that I shud go to a lawyer. 'Well,' the dame says—says she, 'if you go to the lawyers, 'twill cost a purty passel of money, and there'll be no satisfaction after all; why don't ye write to Master George about it?'—and so I did, and he writes back, 'Come up to me, old boy, and bring your papers.' So, after some thought, up I goes, for 'twas a brave step to Lunnon, and I felt uncommon tired and strange-like

when I got there. But I sets off at once for the Temple, and there I found un in his chambers, as he called it, awaiting breakfast for me. He was hearty as ever, and there was two or three friends with un, as free and hearty as hisself; for they comed up at once, and shook hands, and called me old fellow. Arter breakfast, George says, 'Now, then, old Guy, for business, and I must take you and your papers to our great conveyancing man.' So off we went, and I wos 'specting to be showed into some fine place sure, and was quite throwed back to find us in a little dark dingy room, so close and stuffling that I could hardly breathe. There was a dingy, shabby old gentleman, too, sitting in a shabby chair, with a heap of papers afore un on the table. 'This, sir,' said George, a-going up to un, 'is my friend that I spoke about, with the title-deeds.' 'Ah,' says he, putting the glass to his eye, 'a character, eh! *Ganus rustycus!*' I never knowed what he meant, for I was never supposed to be a ganius in any way. However, as he looked up I saw that 'twas Sergeant Thunderston, the great councillor at our 'sizes. 'How be, sir?' says I; 'you don't know me, but I wos foreman of the jury in the great Trevean mine case. Lor', how you did a turn and twist us which way you liked then! I was never easy in my conscience quite about that verdict since.' 'Ah,' says he, smiling in a gashly sort of way, 'as I made a hole in your conscience

then, I must try and mend all the holes in your deeds now in return.' So then he nodded to us, and out we goes, George telling me that I made a capital hit about the verdict.

"Well, I stayed three or four days with un, and we saw all the lions, and had a very jolly time; but I thoft I must be going back to the old dame and the faarm; so George gives me the deeds, and says, 'There, old boy, 'twould be as hard to find a speck of dust in the missus's milk-pans as a flaw in these.' So I says, 'George, if ever you wants a friend, you knows where to find un; one good turn deserves another.' 'Yes,' says he, 'I may want one, God knows, bad enough some day, and I'll claim your promise, old Guy.' So we parted.

"'Twas a bravish long time afore we saw un again; when, one afternoon, as the missus was a-knitting, and I a-smoking my after-dinner pipe, in he walks, a-leading by the hand what I thoft was a chield at first, until he says, 'Here, old Guy, I've brought my little wife to see you;' and she was little, sure. Such a tiny thing, but with such a sweet purty face, with long fair curls falling over it. She was shy at first, but soon got at home with the missus, and smiled and larked so purty like, 'twas quite a treat to look upon her. 'Now,' says George, 'if you can give this giantess of mine houseroom, I will leave her with you. I brought the little woman to the Hall

to get a few roses in her pale cheek from the country air, but the squire and all his belongings are off for the Continent to-morrow; so I came to see if you could take the little mumper in.' In coose we was agreeable enough, and so she stayed wi' us. I thoft at first that she wud be too delicate for our coose living and rough ways, but in a little bit she got used to 'em, and was then as happy and merry as a bird. The dame fitted up a little chamber in the turret for her. We used to call it the Owletry, 'cause two old white owls had took up their quarters in the thatch above; but they had multiplied so, that I was obligated to make 'em immigrate to the barn. Well, this chamber was made all white and tidy and purty, and she was put there. Arterwards we al'ays called it the Dove's Nest. The dame, too, thoft our fare was too coose for her, and wanted to coodle her with her kickshaws, and poms, and vanities, as I call 'em. But she took to the brown bread and the milk quite hearty, and the roast beef, and sometimes even a bit of straikey bacon and greens. But milk was her particular fancy. Lor'-a-massy, how she wud drink the milk and cream! She al'ays had her mouth in the milk-pan a'most, and I used to say she was like the caalves, and had al'ays a white spot of milk on her nose. So she growed quite blooming and hearty, and so frolicsome. She was al'ays coosing about the house or garden.

The dame said she would com shooting in like the sunshine, dance around one, and then shoot out again. You could hear her, too, all over the place, singing like a bird, and larfing; Lor'-amassy, what a larf it was!—the purtiest moosie I ever heard."

The curate muttered beneath his breath—

"Through the very heart it thrilleth,
When from crimson-threaded lips
Silver-treble laughter trilleth."

"Just so," said old Penrice, "that was just the very way it was with us. So we felt cruel grieved when George comed to take her away; and when she was gone, the place seemed duller and darker, and I said to the dame that I thoft the autumn weather had shut in very early.

"We never saw them again. Soon arter Georgey got a fine place in Ingy, and took the little woman out with un. We had one letter from 'em there, but 'twere wrote so close, and so cut and smoked, that we cudn't make much ov it. There was a box too comed from Lunnun, with a drinking-cup made out of buffalo's horn for me, and some cheny and knick-knacks for the dame, and bow and arrows for Tom. And now com my bit of romance. One market-day the Boots comes up and says that a gentleman wents to speak to me in the inn. So up I goes; and there wos a stiff, prim man in

rusty black, and there was a little maid a-lying half asleep on the sofy. 'Mr Penrice, I believe,' says he. 'Yeoman Penrice,' says I, 'at your service.' 'The same, I suppose,' he saith. 'I have to deliver to you a charge and a letter from your late friend George Carthew.' 'My late friend; why, sure, George ben't dead?' The grim man nodded. 'And his little wife?' 'Dead too,' he says. I never had such a turn in my life; my heart went quite cold, and my limbs went all of a tremble. I was never good at crying, but I cud have cried right out like a woman then, except for the grim man. 'Perhaps, Mr Penrice,' says he, 'you had better read this letter.' 'Twas from George, very short, but I knows it by heart. It went thus—

"'DEAR OLD GUY,—I am dying, and the dear little woman is gone before me. We leave one little orphan girl, without a friend in the world. Will you give her a shelter and bread? I know old Guy will do this for the sake of old times, and this quiets my last hours. God bless you, dear old boy.—Yours,

'GEORGE CARTHEW.'

And then there was a P.S.—'I send with the child the only thing I have of any value.'

"'Is this the little maid then?' says I, going up

to her, and taking her on my lap; 'and will she com and live with the old faarmer?' She put her little arms round my neck, and looked up, just like her mother. 'Do you accept the trust then?' says the grim man. 'In coose I do,' says I. 'Where should George's orfling find a home 'cept under my roof-tree?' 'And you agree to keep her until claimed by her friends?' 'Yes,' says I; 'and I hope 'twill be long enough afore that time com.' 'It is my duty, then, to give you this also,' he says, giving me a box, with something in it, tho' I didn't take much note of it, 'and p'rhaps you will sign this paper.' I thoft it oncommon queer to sign for the little maid, as tho' she'd been a head of cattle or a pack of wool, but I did—and I was oncommon glad when the grim man refused to go back to Tregarrow. So when the little maid had took somewhat to eat, I orders a po-shay, puts in her little chist, and away we drove. Lor'-a-massy, how the people did stare to see me in a po-shay! They thoft I was canvassing the county; and the dame too, she rins out in a flurry as we drove up to the door, and looked quite startled and 'mazed like, when I said, 'Here, dame—here's a foundling and orfling for to mus.' But when she knowed the rights, she took the little maid in her arms, and hugged and kissed her. So she wos put at once into the Dove's Nest, and from that time we took her to

our home, and she was to us as a daughter. And that's how I com by my legacy."

"It must have been a great charge," remarked the curate, "to bring up a young lady like that?"

"Oh, no! my dame can rear anything, from a kitten or a calf to a chield. She brings up everything hearty and keenly. Everything thrives under the dame."

"But you must have found some difficulty about education in this remote part of the world?"

"Edication! oh, there be some things which edicate theirselves, and she wos one. Lily was al'ays out in the fields and the woods, and in the sunshine among the flowers, and with the birds, and the beasts, and the bees; and I'm sure that she larnt more thus than from all the old books, especially the old Latten. Then the missus was a bewtiful needlewoman, and taught her to hem and sew, to spin, and to make cream and cheeses, and seed-cakes, to cure hams and pickle onions, and preserve plums, and suchlike."

The yeoman poured forth this programme of instruction *ore rotundo*, as though he felt rather proud of it. The curate, however, heaved a sigh, which might have done duty as a groan, at hearing this *rôle* of accomplishments for a young lady.

"Then," continued he, "the pordigal taught her to be a beautiful hosswoman, and bought a filly for her. Lor'-a-massy! how I stared when I looked in

my banker's book and saw the price of that filly. 'Twould have bought I don't know how many steers."

"But, p'rhaps," hinted the curate, "the young lady's friends, if they reclaimed her, might expect to find her versed in the more modern accomplishments."

"Then they should have looked out for that themselves; but I don't think they would have much right to complain even about all that fal-lal larning, for Lily used to go with Miss Emily to the squire's governess for all that, only I forbid the Latten. No, thank God, I wudn't hear of that. There was a lady to com to the Hall, a sister of the squire's, and she brought her little daughter with her: the little maid was in a very bad way—a-dying of consumption—and they did everything to indulge her. So she took a fancy to Lily, and wud have her there for hours, sometimes days with her; and the mother, for a return like, taught her parley-vous-ing and 'talianosing, not with my knowledge, tho' no bad have com ov it, nor no good either that I knows ov."

"Oh," said the curate, "it must be a great advantage to have acquired the languages under such circumstances."

"Well, I don't know about advantages; she can never find anybody to speak 'em here. To be sure, she had once a chance with her Italiane; a poor

little 'Talian boy com to the faarm one day all footsore and worn out wi' hunger and travel. Lily went up and spoke to'm, and at the sound of his own tongue his eye brightened, and he jumped up for joy. It seemed to hearten 'm more than the beef and beer. He stayed three days to talk with Lily, and then the tramp fit took 'm again.

"However, the lady too was a beautiful moosician, and she taught Lily to sing and play oncommon fine. Then the little maid died away one spring, and she had ordered all her things—her boxes, her paint-tools, her guytar, and her grand piany—to be sent to Lily. Lor'-a-massy! When that grand piany com, what a quandary it put me in! I cudn't put un in the hall, for that wudn't be fitty, and 'twos too big for the dame's bowdyoire, so we wos obligated to clear out the great parlor and put it to rights, and the women used to slock me in ov nights to hear Lily sing.

"So you see my legacy han't been neglected or brought up quite like a faarmer's wench, and she've paid us back, she've paid us back, she have. 'Twas jest the mother over again, dancing and singing about the house. She wud put a new spirit into our life, and give us a new nature, like, at times. Then she brought some books from the Hall about old English characters, and the verses of a fine old passon, and some old ballads, which she wud read

by the hour in the nights, and draw me away from thinking too much of the crops and the cattle and the price of wool. I don't know what wud have com of me but for Lily, 'specially arter the pordigal went away; I shud have took to saving, or to drinking, or growed melancholy, perhaps.

"It used to be so cozy thus after work-hours, and then her singing of the evening hymn is the finest prayer I ever heard, and sends one to bed so calm and comfortable like.

"Yes, she've been a very blessed legacy to me."

"But you said something," remarked the curate, pausing some time after the yeoman's narrative, "about a box which came with the legacy."

"Oh, yes, 'twas the queerest thing you ever seed, a bone cup with tinsel trade all round the rim."

"'Twas curious that such a thing should be sent so far—it must be more valuable than you think. I have been bred in cities, and among merchants, and have seen and heard somewhat of gems and precious stones. I should like to see this cup."

"Shalt see un—shalt see un anon. Here we be now at the barton."

As he spoke they came in front of a large gate which stood wide open, seemingly inviting all comers, and rendering rather superfluous the offices of the great bell which swung over it. There little needs a summons where the doors are open,

and the boards plenteous. Opposite stood the house. The space between was a quadrangle—a large paved court with a circle of green in the centre, and diamond-shaped plots of grass at the corners. On one side rose a high wall, along which was raised a garden-terrace, planted with the old-fashioned sweet flowers—sweet-williams and gilliflower—and beds of old sweet herbs, marjoram, thyme—all for the especial delectation of the bees. These were their summer delights. Poor bees! Christmas seemed anything but a jovial time for them. Their homes looked very forlorn and dreary with the snow weighing down their thatch, and the icicles hanging from their eaves, chilling all ideas of pleasant hummings, and the sweetness of honey and the honeycomb.

"They'm profitless things, rather, the bees," said the yeoman, "but I like to hear and see 'em in the summer-time, and I love too the old-fashioned flowers and the yarbs, which they loves. The dame, too, likes her jars of honey and her bits of comb, and a glass of methegelin."

On the other side of the quadrangle was a broad walk, bordered by a low hedge of privet and thorn, which seemed intended rather as a boundary than a fence, and from it a succession of garden-slopes stretched down to the valley below. At the end of this walk, near the entrance-gate, rose a grassy knoll, crowned by a clump of trees, which formed in them-

selves a natural arbour. An old yew-tree—a lusty old fellow, some centuries old, yet so vigorous and green and hale that he seemed only yet in the prime of manhood—was the magnate of the group, and rather overlooked and overbore his *vis-à-vis*, a green bay-tree, which seemed, however, flourishing enough to offer an illustration of the most prosperous sinner; between, a tall poplar rose like a banner-staff. Beside the knoll a fine horse-chestnut threw his branches far and wide, stretching them partly over the wall out into the world, and partly in kindly tender towards the neighbour clump. Below, on a plateau which seemed to have been formed as a pedestal for it, stood a glorious old pink hawthorn. The snow-flakes lay on it now like icy buds, and ever and anon a gust of wind would scatter them in a sleety storm, a cruel mockery of the shower of delicious buds with which the sweet south would sprinkle the grass in the beauteous summer-time.

In the midst of the clump a summer-house had been erected—not such an atrocity as these things generally are, but still a standing insult to the natural screen behind. This was a favourite spot with old Penrice; from hence he could command the prospect of his goodly domain of the open fields, stretching from a broad belt of upland down to the meadows, through which gurgled and rippled a tiny brook, struggling now with an invading border of

ice—of the large pond into which it flowed, sheeted now with ice, though the glint of a starbeam here and there marked breaks and fissures in the cold surface—of the substantial home, with its cold outside and its reeking chimneys—of the great masses of outbuildings, barns, and stacks, which, with their white tops and their irregular shapes, and in the shadowyness of distance, looked like a field of icebergs—of the broad lands stretching far and far beyond, shaded here and there by darker spots where the copses and plantations lay.

Old Penrice insensibly led his guest to this point of view. The scene, even under its present dreary aspect, was a pleasant one to him.

"Bless me!" ejaculated the curate, as he looked down over the homestead, "I was not aware that there was a village hereabout."

"No more there ben't," answered yeoman Penrice.

"No! then what are all those houses?" asked he, pointing to the outbuildings.

"They—why, they're the town-place—the faarm-yard—the haggard, as you calls it up the country;" and the old fellow chuckled long and loud, half with humour, half with pride at the indirect compliment paid to the extent of his possessions.

"I had no idea," said the curate, "that it would have been so extensive."

"Why, you see," continued the yeoman, "Trigar-row is a bravish large faarm, and there be one or

two small outlying ones ; so, as we brings all the crops to one stead, it makes a very keenly show."

"Yes," murmured the curate ; "it is a goodly heritage."

"Why, yes, so it be, thank God ; and I sits here for hours sometimes in the summer, a-looking at the crops as they are ripening for the har'est, and then to the last year's ones stacked all snug in the mowey ; and I do rejoice in the abundance."

"Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years ; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." The curate delivered this text almost involuntarily, as though he were speaking aloud ; but old Penrice started at it, as a man does when he thinks that he hears his conscience speak with the tongue of another man. The text was one which had evidently obtruded itself many a time ; it was one which he had tussled with and evaded—which he had protested against, and set aside, and argued down time after time, without actually overcoming it.

"No, no," remonstrated the yeoman ; "'tis not exactly like that—no, not so bad as that neither : I al'ays gives of my abundance. If I don't squander, I don't hoard ; and nobody ever goeth from my doors a-hungered or athirst."

"Yes, very likely," replied the curate ; "but there is, my friend—but there is a pride of giving as well as of saving, and both belong to the pride of prosperity."

"'Tis true enough. I daresay all you say is gospel; and I don't doubt that the trial of that pordigal was sent as a judgment for my fatness of heart: and God knows it have done much; for what pleasure can it be to look out on all these possessions, and feel perhaps that I may have no child to inherit it? But come along; let us go and see the dame."

"A good, solid, substantial old place, ben't it?" said Penrice, as they stood in front of the house.

'Twas in reality a substantial place. It had evidently, in former times, been part of a small manor-house, and had then become the residence for the barton. The front was of plain grey stone, and at each angle was a square turret. The windows were large and mullioned with stone mouldings. The top had been battlemented once, but the heavy thatched roof had either obscured or destroyed all trace of this. That thatch was certainly an incongruity: an attempt had been made to train ivy along the walls, but the stone was too cold and hard even for it to gain a holding, and it hung down in hungry-looking branches, beaten and dejected. On the side of one turret some roses and clematis had been trained, by means of a trellis-work, to cluster around the windows of the chamber. This was the Dove's Nest.

"'Tis a brave substantial old place," reiterated the yeoman.

"Yes," assented the curate; "it certainly is, and, spite of its plainness, is somewhat picturesque too; but I must say that I think the thatch incongruous."

"I knowed you would say so; that's what they all say—the passon, the squire, Tom, and all; incongruous—incongruous. 'Twas al'ays the same cry with 'em. But the thatch was put there by my grandfa'r, and repaired by my fayther, and it shall stand there for all my day."

"Thou fool! how knowest thou what a day may bring forth?" was on the curate's tongue for utterance, but he would not venture on another text that night; and he saw, besides, that this prejudice of the thatch, from long assertion and contradiction, had grown to the strength of a principle.

CHAPTER V.

The interior, however, was the strong side of Tregarrow. We will enter whilst the yeoman and his guest are shaking off the snow from their shoes in the entrance-hall. On the left of this was a room with a blazing fire in its large grate, which showed cheerfully through the half-open door; but it had, nevertheless, a stiff, stately, unsocial look. This was evidently the apartment which had been offered up as a temple to the grand piano. A little further, on the same side, was a

smaller and cozier room—a perfect little snugger. This was the dame's "bowdayoire," as her spouse called it; a dear little sanctuary suggestive of home meetings, home talk, and home affections. Opposite the door was an oak staircase, very broad and very massive, but very dark also and very slippery—the scene of many a fall, and the cause of many a bruise—for the yeoman considered carpets aristocratic, and would have the stairs left in the nakedness of their native oak. In a dusty corner at the foot of the staircase stood an old clock. In the obscurity of this position, the face of this horologe was quite an enigma. The large gilt figures, on a dark ground, would have made the note of time difficult under the most favourable circumstances—now it was a perfect mystery; but when it struck, then it showed what a clock with good, strong, healthy works could do. Its accuracy, too, was a proverb. The church and town clocks deferred to it, and all minor timepieces and watches were set by it most humbly.

On the right, a large door in the wainscot partition opened into the chief room. In fact this was the interior; here the interior life was passed; here, too, was the place of the hearthstone, and that made it sacred in Guy Penrice's eyes. The first perception of the interior was pleasant certainly. A genial warmth took possession at once of mind and body. The cold was completely con-

quered here ; not only conquered, but annihilated. The thought of it even was subdued. Standing there, one looked out on the heaps of snow through the windows as though it were a picture of a winter in Russia. The warmth reigned supreme ; it had things all its own way ; it swept even into odd crannies and corners, leaving not a chilly spot ; and if a blast of cold came through an open door, it was at once seized and whirled and sucked into the maelstrom of heat. Servant girls as they came in ceased to blow their fingers ; servant men to stamp their feet or beat their bodies : a few minutes before that hearth were enough. 'Twas a glorious hearth that ; no scanty starveling thing half-choked with bricks, or just built a few feet into the wall, but a large-hearted, open-armed hearth, which thrust itself well out on the floor, and seemed to invite all to come there and be warm.

The fire, too, was worthy of the hearth. It would have kindled the devotion even of a fire-worshipper. It was a perfect structure. All the elements of a fire were there, all scientifically piled and arranged. There was a layer of motts, as the stumps of old trees are called in the West, another of coal, then came a pile of peat, and over all would lie the dry crackling fagots. The fire took its character from the element which predominated at the time ; now it glowed bright, strong, and steady

in the motts and coals—now burnt more dull and heavily with the peat, and then, as it caught the sticks of the fagots, its flames would blaze and roar up the chimney. That old chimney, too, black and grimy with the smoke of centuries, looked like the crater of an old volcano, as the columns of smoke and flame whirled up it, clouding for the time the bit of clear bright sky above.

The mantelpiece was of dark oak without carving or ornament, unless that horse-shoe nailed on the front of it could be called one. We grieve to reveal this weakness of our yeoman, though he certainly made no attempt to conceal it. The horse-shoe was not placed with any cheat-the-devil compromise in an obscure corner or crevice, but stood well out in front; nor was it a small shoe, such as might have fallen from Lilian's filly, but a good substantial piece of iron which had undoubtedly once shod the hoof of Dobbin the plough-horse. Old Penrice rather paraded his superstition, and prided himself on the efficacy of the talisman. He used to boast that old Jenny Giant could never cross his threshold; which was true enough, as all the dogs had been trained to make an onslaught on her the instant she made the attempt.

The apartment itself was neither exactly hall nor kitchen, but had somewhat the character of each. Jonathan Oldbuck might have called it the symposium; for there the yeoman, his family, and

dependants, sat down to the daily meals, there were the evening gatherings, and there were held the feasts and family meetings. The yeoman said he did not care whether 'twere hall or kitchen—'twas the place of the hearthstone, and that was enough for him. All the culinary processes had, however, been removed from hence, as an open door showed a second kitchen, where a large grate and a still glowing oven seemed to have been fully employed of late. As a further proof of disfranchisement as a kitchen, the dressers and the pewter, the glory of a farmhouse, had been displaced by a curious piece of furniture; it was, like everything else, of dark oak, and in shape was part cabinet, part press, part book-shelf, or rather a union of all. On the ground shelf stood a cavalry helmet with long horsehair plume, a breastplate, and broadsword, all highly burnished, seemingly a most impertinent pretence in such a place; but old Penrice cherished most religiously these reminiscences of his having belonged to the yeomanry, and of his having gone out when the country called him. The shelf above held implements of a service much more in accordance with the *genius loci*—a punch-bowl of the old grey dragon pattern, which had evidently seen good service, and owed its present entirety to one or two rivets; a plain silver tankard, and the cup of buffalo's horn flanking it on either side; a large

deerhorn-handled knife and fork, strongly suggestive of rounds of beef backing it behind. In other recesses were the books which Lilian had added to his library, and little models of ploughs and winnowing-machines.

The dame, too, had her relics and knick-knacks. She had her bowl—a syllabub bowl—handsomer and more modern than her spouse's. There were also pieces of delicate china-ware spread about, and an ivory cabinet, evidently a gift from George. Treasured there was also an old-fashioned pillow for lace-making, with all its little bobbins, evidently a relic of the industrial skill of some grandmother or great-aunt. Lilian had striven to get a place for her guitar, but this was ignominiously banished by the yeoman, who said he would have no such faldals there. The room retained much of its original character when belonging to a higher state. An oak cornice ran round the ceiling, and the walls were wainscoted. Their dark tone was enlivened now by wreaths and garlands of laurel, laurestines, and holly berries, which hung on the panels and columns of the same, which were ranged up and down between them. Little sconces, too, for lighting up, stood in their centres. Next to warmth, the characteristic most predominant and manifest was fatness—plenty. It had its witnesses in the stout servants, who moved about with the satisfied air of full-bellied labour—in the dogs, whose sleekness

spoke of a fatness in the crumbs which fell from the table—in the cats, which purred before the fires in lazy innocence of the necessity of catching mice except for pastime. It had its tokens in the great hams and pieces of bacon which lay like boulders in the succession of racks which hung all along the ceiling, some cut flitches or sides showing tempting strata of fat and lean—in the geese and salmon which hung to be dried and smoked in the chimney—in the dressed joints which were seen through the open door of the pantry, all ready for the approaching supper—in the turkeys, geese, and ribs of beef which hung from hooks, in preparation for the morrow's feast—in the more distant vista of salting-pans and pickling-tubs, milk-pails, and large home-made cheeses. There was fatness everywhere—a fatness which had endured through generations; and it seemed as if leanness had never fallen on the tribe.

Waste and wastrels were, however, bitterly denounced by Guy Penrice. Every one should have a full belly, he said, but every one should work for it. The chairs and forms had been placed along the wall, and the supper tables drawn up also into retirement under the windows, leaving the floor clear for dance or revel.

The dame was moving about with a host of hand-maidens finishing the arrangements. A buxom dame she was—comely and brisk. Her face would

have been homely but for a gentle bright expression which lay on it, and which had evidently grown out of contact with higher natures. Years of ease and comfort had left her cheeks fresh and soft; her arms, too, were still smooth and plump. She wore her own soft grey hair, for her spouse denounced unsparingly all frisees and frisettes, and this added to the effect of softness. Her dress was behind the fashion of her generation, in accordance with the taste of her husband. A lace cap was fastened under her chin by pinner; her gown was of thick strong silk of sober hue, the skirt of which was now looped up through the pocket-hole to avoid unnecessary contact with dust or dirt. As a further precaution, she had wrapped a large apron around her. Her eye was not sharp, nor was her voice; and yet the eye seemed to be everywhere, and the voice had a certain peremptoriness which insured immediate attention. The servants all said that missus would do more in one hour with her quiet way, than the maister in two with his tantrums; and his brother, who set up for a wag, observed that Guy would stop to crow, whilst the missus went and laid an egg. The dame evidently indulged in a delusion common to the house-wives of that day, that they made the most of their time by resorting to peripatetic industry, and had accordingly a stocking hung to her waist, in which she ever and anon knit a few stitches. As she heard a

strange voice in the entrance with her husband, the apron was hastily thrown aside, and the skirt restored to its original flow.

The yeoman ushered in his guest with a "this is cheery, ben't it," and he stretched forth his palms, and then rubbed them as if shaking hands with the warmth. "Here, dame, here's the curate, Master Jones, come to see ye."

The dame made a half-curtsy as she said, "I am sure Mr Jones is kindly welcome, but I'm afeard he'll find our feast plays rather rough."

"Oh, he's come to see us in the rough," replied her spouse, "and don't expect to find us very jontee or French polished."

"Won't he come into the parlour for a bit?" suggested the dame.

"No, no; you can take us there some night when you have your fal-dals and your company; we'll spend the night by the hearth now; so come along, passon." Then taking off his hat, rubbing his head, shaking himself into his boots, and making an abortive attempt to produce a better mutual understanding between his waistcoat and breeches, by which measures he seemed to have accomplished his toilet for the evening, he sat down in a large chair by the hearth. The curate sat opposite, and the dame slid quietly into a bee-hive by the side of her spouse, having first filled the silver tankard with a fragrant beverage, and placed it by him.

"Pass round the cup, dame," so the dame took a slight sip, just kissed the cup, and passed it on to the curate.

"Don't be afeard, sir," said Penrice, "twon't hurt; 'tis only cider warmed up with spices, and with a roast crab-apple bobbing about in it. Cider is proper faarmer's drink, so is ale, but I can't take kindly to your brandies and hollands, and your ports and sherries—they don't seem to me proper for faarmer folks, or faarmer life; but here's to you," as the cup passed on to him, "and wishing you hearty welcome."

"That seems a solid cup," remarked the curate.

"Yes, 'tis very solid, and have stood good use too, for 'tis very anshent, and have got the date, Anno Domini 1755, but the inscription be rubbed out, and we don't know how we comed by un, whether 'twos a prize, or what they calls a testimonial. I should think, however, there have been liquor enough in that tankard to float a little ship." The curate did not doubt the probability.

"The only other piece of plate belonging to us was a large snuff-box. My brother have got un, and always wears un in his waistcoat; he's a small man, you know, and we says that it weighs un down, and makes un go lop-sided like a crab."

"I'm afeard, Mr Jones, you'll find it cruel dull down here-along," broke in the dame; "you up-country folk ben't used to our ways like. The

vicar was good company once, but since he've been so hurried in mind about Miss Emily, he han't been so social."

"There ben't no mirth nor moosic in un now," chimed in her spouse. "Then there's the squire, too, a-gone furrin to what they calls the Spa."

"Bad health?—Gout, I suppose?"

"No, I think 'twas rather what they calls a atrophy of the purse that drove un away, though he was cruel broke, sure, arter he had to give up the hounds and the hosses, and never took heart in anything, specially arter that young Rankin begun to hunt the country. If that pordigal Tom was here he wud have took ye about and showed ye some sport. Natheless, if you'm a sportsman, you can al'ays have a day o'er the manor; and if you'm fond of riding, there's al'ays a hoss for ye."

The curate acknowledged the kindness.

The dame now took up her part, and made inquiries as to his lodging and his comforts, revolving in her own mind how she could supply the poor young man with fresh milk, butter, and eggs from the farm without offence. The curate began to feel inwardly as well as outwardly warm, under this flow of good offices. He thought, however, that the absence of the legacy made rather a gap in the scene. 'This absence was soon accounted for.

"Dame," said her spouse, "where's Lily? where's the lass?"

"Oh, she's gone to fetch the girls; they'll be here presently."

"They'll be heard afore they'm seen—half a mile off you'll hear 'em twittering and chirping like sparrows in the snowy morning."

Another sort of visitor now arrived. "Good to know who that is by the dogs," said the dame.

The sound of his step seemed the signal for a general gathering of the canine species. They came from every hole and corner. The old spaniel uncoiled himself from the mat—the sheep-dog came stretching and yawning from the wood corner—the old pointer left his place at the master's feet—a large greyhound abandoned a reconnaissance in the lower regions, and stalked forth, all to do honour to the huntsman Jim. These were all content with a respectful calm obeisance, acknowledged by a pat on the head or a rub of the ear. A much more enthusiastic reception was given by an old terrier, who might have been taken before for a half-charred log of wood lying on the hearth, and who jumped up now and advanced towards Jim, grinning, wriggling, twisting, and doubling himself, as though he were tying himself in knots and then bursting them again, or sometimes he would seem to go through himself and come out at the other end. He had apparently reached the height of bliss when taken up in the huntsman's arms. This special favour

was not due to him for his extrinsic beauty—an uglier creature never stood on four legs. He was an old, dirty-white, straight-haired terrier, very small and very lean, with a black spot over one eye, which looked like a patch—the other had been half-closed by a bite—and part of his jaw was bitten off, besides smaller wounds. But Cappy, familiar for Capsicum, was a hero in his generation, whose deeds of prowess stood high in the dog chronicle.

“The wishes of the season, marm, and many returns, and the same to you, maister,” said Jim, entering the circle, but drawing back, as he saw the curate, with “I axes pardon, I didn’t see you had company.”

“Come on, James,” shouted the yeoman, “’tis only Passon Jones, and he knows that we’rn all Jans and Joans to-night; there’s the tankard by you, though I believe you despises cider.”

If Jim had a contempt for that beverage it certainly required a long experience and a deep pull to create the inspiration, for his lips seemed glued to the cup, and he quitted it with a sigh—half of satisfaction at the meeting, and half of regret at the parting.

“Cappy han’t forgot you, James,” said the dame.

“Good to know he oughtn’t too, arter all I’ve done for un, marm.”

“Dogs have a strong instinct in such matters,

I believe," remarked the curate, wishing to fall in with the conversation of his company, "and remember a kindness a long time."

"You may well say that, sir; there ben't nothing more grateful than dowgs—that is, good dowgs—they beats 'umans in that; they never forgets a good turn or a good word, or them that has treated 'em well. Now, there's this yere Cappy, he'll never forget how I nussed un when his jaw was tore off—will you, Cappy?" Cappy answered by a most unmusical howl and abortive lickings at Jim's face—the canine method perhaps of blowing a kiss.

"He met with an accident, then?" asked the curate.

"I doesn't know whe'er's you can call it an accident or no, for 'twas all in the way of his dooty. This is how it wos. There was one cover—the maister knows un, Dunbrook—where, whenever we drawed un, we al'ays found a fox in the same place 'xactly, and when he broke he wud al'ays take off in the same line, and when we comed to a certain spot we shud lose un altogether, and he'd vanish just like magic; so we used to call un the wizard, for we knowed 'twas the same fox. Well, one time we drawed, and, 'cording to custom, found our ould friend. Afore he broke the squire sent on some chaps to turn un, and so he took to the hills, and we drove 'im to 'arth up among the tors. Then

the squire swore he wud hae un out, for he was mortal anxious to see this yere wizard; so we sends for picks, and puts in Cappy and another terrier. Afore the men cud come to dig, we heerd a growling and a scuffling in the mouth of the 'arth, and out cum the wizard with Cappy a-hanging on to un. Lor'-a-massy, he was the biggest fox I ever seed, all straiky with grey. As soon as he got into the open he flinged Cappy from un as thof he'd been the twig of a tree, and drashed un down to the ground. So I did but jest put the dowgs on the wizard and cum back to Cappy. There he was, a-lying with his jaw hanging by a little bit of skin, so I bandages un as well as I cud, and makes a little bed of the moss and leaves for un. Well, we lost the wizard again at the ould spot, and then I goes and takes home Cappy afore me on the pony. I made a bed for un in the saddle-room and nussed un day and night, and sometimes sot up with un to dress his wounds. Well, I never, thof he was in cruel pain, heard this little dowlg groan or whine, but he wud look up in my face as much as to say, 'Tis an honourable wound, James, and was got all in the way of dooty."

"More shame to you, James," said the dame, "for teaching un to fight and get in harm's way."

"No, marm, I didn't teach un, 'twas his natur; if we hadn't trained un to go agin the varments

he wud hae been fighting with his own kind. I never put dowg agin dowg; but some is born to fight. 'Tis the same with the 'umans. Some ov 'em is never happy 'cept they is giving one anither black eyes, or shoving a bayonet or driving a bit of lead through one anither."

"You seem," said the curate, "to have made the dog a regular study."

"In coose I have; 'twas my dooty, my vocashun, as the vicar called it, to study 'em. You'll never rule nothing, dowg or 'uman, 'cep you studies 'em and watches 'em in all their ways. Now there's the doctors, and, axing your pardon, the passons too, wud give the same dose to everybody. There's old Doctor Drenchpot wud treat an ould scarecrow like me same as he wud the maister, and old Pasion Piejohn wud preach the same sarment to the missus as he would to Rich Jope" (Rich Jope was a noted poacher, and therefore in Jim's eye a criminal of blackest soul). "No, you can never do nothing with dowgs or 'umans that way. They must know you, and you must know they. Now you flog one dowg and spoils un, breaks his sperit—you flog anither, and makes un a good hound for life; you may trust one dowg to eat by hisself, and you must watch anither or he'd eat till he bust."

"Why, you are quite a philosopher, James," said the curate, "and in your love for the dog, would

almost sympathise with the Indian of whom the poet speaks."

"What was that, sir, please?" said James, eagerly.

The curate quoted the well-known lines—

"Lo! the poor Indian, whose untutored mind
Sees God in clouds and hears him in the wind,
And thinks, admitted to that equal sky,
His faithful dog should bear him company."

"Not onreasonable ayther in a haythen as knowed no better," remarked James.

"I believe," struck in the yeoman, "that James is almost a haythen about dogs; and I often thinks he fancies that he and the squire and the hounds will turn up together somewheres."

Even the mild dame joined in the attack.

"Yes, James, I'm sure the way you took on about the hounds was almost sinful. You cudn't have grieved more if they'd been children or friends."

"Well, marm, and wo'sent they friends? I'd a-reared 'em all from puppies, leastwise knowed their gets, and had tended 'em, and broke 'em, and mussed 'em, and gied 'em their mait, and hunted with 'em, and had long discoose with 'em, for days and years some ov 'em, and knowed all their ways and their wants, so 'twas nat'ral I shud feel wisht at parting from 'em."

"That's James's romance—his journey to Lunnun with the hounds. I've towld the passon mine, dame," said old Guy, turning towards his spouse.

The dame nodded significantly, as if she felt well assured of that.

"I doen't knaw that there was much romance in it," returned James; "but 'twos the dismallest time I ever knawed—'twos an uncommon wisht time."

The curate, however, expressed a wish to hear the story.

"Well, then, you must knaw, sir, that some time back the squire was obligated to put down the hounds, as he was agoing to furrin pairts. So he solded 'em to a gent up the country, and I was to take 'em up to un. 'Twos all very aisy so long as we gaed along the road, for the dowgs was used to that, but when they com aboard the steamer at Plymouth they growed mortal onaisy and mistrustful, and wud com about me a-rubbing agin my legs, and looking up in my face with a sort of whine, as much as to say, 'What doth all this main?' and when I sot down they wud com and talk to me, one arter the ither as thof they thoft we was going to part. Little Fortune cum fust—you knawed her, maister—she wos the purtiest and the fleetest bitch in all the pack—and she puts her paw up and looks in my face with her purty way and gave a soft whine like, I knawed wot she was a-saying—she wos saying, 'Now, James, what be a-going to do with that

last pup of mine? he was a booty, you knaw, and I hopes you'll remember un.' 'All right, old gurl,' says I; 'I'll tend un as if he was a cheeld, and bring un up as a hound of his get hoft to be.' Then anither com up and tells his story, and then anither. When it com on dark I lied down a bit with the dowgs around me, and cruel dismal 'twos. All at once I feels a nose shuved under my arm, and when I looked down I seed 'twas old Royal. Now Royal, you know, maister, was a very proud high-minded hound, and thof he was very dootiful in the kennel, he was never so social-like as the rest, but wud kep off, as much as to say, 'You'm only huntsman, James, but I'm a high-breed hound;' thof if the squire com in and sot down, as he did sometimes, he wud stand with his haid on his knee for a hour maybe. You knaw, maister, I thinks there's a sort of freemasonry among they high-breeds—dowgs or 'umans."

"I thinks so too, James, though 'tis agin my politics."

"Well I was astonished when I seed old Royal, and more so when he begins a-muzzling me, and crying o'er me, as much as to say, 'We han't ben so thick like as the rest, but we'm good friends, and I'm sorry to part, old fellow.' When the other dowgs heerd un yowling, they sot up tuning their pipes too, and there was a pretty how-d'ye-do. The captin he com then and tells me to stop that

darned noise, so I wos obliged to quiet 'em ; but 'twos a mortal drear night that, my heart almost broke. Well, at last we lands and gets to the place where we wos going ; a nashun fine place 'twos, but they never axed me to sot and rest, or hae a sup of ale or a bite ov bread and cheese, and just sends me on to the kennel. Lor'-a-massy, what a place that wos—'twos more like a palace than a kennel. There was coorts for exercise, and feeding coorts, and biling kitchens ; and the floor of the dowgs' place was all a-done hard like with lime or somewhat ; and the binches for the beds wos all so roomy and fine—I was a'most 'mazed at it all ; but I didn't see no foxes' haid nowheres. Then there cum up a man to me ; he wos so nashun smurt I thoft he wos the maister, and was a-going to touch my cap to un, but I stops jest in time. He had a fine buff waistcoat, with sheeny buttons on, and whitey corduroys, all cotched in at the ankle with little buttons ; and the buttons of his coat wos all over foxes and dowgs and osses. He had, too, a great blue neck-kercher round his neck, with a gowld fox's haid stuck in un ; and his hat was thrawed on one side, sassy and janty like. He seemed to look down on me, thof I had my bestes clothes on. 'Ah,' says he, 'my man, you brought the hounds for us from the West.' 'Iss, sir,' says I, 'and good dowgs they be on the whole, and I hopes you'll find 'em so.' 'Ah,' says he, 'they

looks goodish dowgs, though rayther in the rough.' 'Iss, sir,' says I, 'we'm all rayther in the rough, down along.' 'Oh, I daresay but they'll do very well with a little weeding, and a little of our fining and discipline; and I don't doubt we shall have as good a season as we had last year.' 'May I ax, making so bowld,' says I, 'how many foxes you killed last year?' 'Oh,' says he, getting a bit red, 'we doan't care so much about the number, but we likes to kill 'em secundem hartem.' 'Oh, then,' says I, 'I'm afeard you'll have to onlearn our dowgs a brave lot, for our squire have toft 'em to kill their fox.' With that I says 'Good morning, sir,' and then gits to the door as fast as possible, but I soon hears a yowl, and then a whip a-going, so I puts my fingers in my ears and rins, and never stops till I gits to the town. Sure 'twos a wisht time—a cruel wisht time."

James, on the strength of this story, obtained great credit for repartee in his own little world, and was looked up to as one who had "thrawed the up-country chap a fale." "Herè, James, wash down the story," said the yeoman, handing over the tankard.

"Well then," said he, as he raised it to his lips, "here's a health—I can't help it, maister, if you be angered, I must do it—here's a health to Mr Tom, who's away."

"James," said the yeoman, with rather got-up

indignation, "you knows I never allows nobody to name that pordigal but myself."

"More shame to you," retorted the dame, quietly, "on such a night as this too. It's to be open doors and closed hearts, full board and scant love, then, with us. Our own are to be the only ones shut out. That's rayther mockery, ben't it."

The curate too muttered something about there being nothing but peace and goodwill and Christian love at such a holy time.

Old Guy glared from one to another, as though he intended to stand at bay, but he thought better of it, and taking the tankard in his hand, said, "You'm right, dame, so here's a health to un, and God bless un." The last words were intended to be drowned in the cup, but were given with too much emphasis to be lost. A great clatter of tongues and laughing was now heard. "Ah, there's they be," said old Guy, "they'm about half a mile off now."

The yeoman was either much out in his calculation, or they had accomplished the distance in marvellously short time, for they were soon heard rustling in the entrance hall. The party consisted of the yeoman's brother and his daughters, Lily bringing up the rear.

The brother was the very opposite of Guy; he was a little, old, leathery man—in fact, very like a bundle of crankly leather tied together; one of

those contrarieties often seen in families. It had been remarked once that he would never fill his brother's boots, when a wag added, that if he was pounded and rolled out, he wouldn't furnish material enough to make boot-trees for them. The daughters, however, asserted the family type very strongly. They were what would be called fine women, though perhaps rather strong in tone and colour; and in the breadth of shoulder and development of bone, did not exhibit much of the line of beauty. They came in, however, bringing a fine healthy breath of life with them—bracing as the air outside, without its coldness.

"There she is, that's Lily," said the yeoman, nudging the curate; "she always wears that red cloak and hood to please me." Any one who observed how well the loose hood with its white lining suited the fair round face beneath, would not have given Miss Lily credit for much self-sacrifice. Like the ballad Lilian, she looked—

"So innocent arch, so cunning simple,
From beneath her gathered wimple,
Glancing with her deep blue eyes,
Till the lightning laughs dimple
The baby roses in her cheek."

We have taken a liberty with the poet in respect of the eyes. Our Lilian's were blue, deep blue, but the lightning laughs played in them, and over the whole face, or rather a lightning joyousness

a joyousness born of sunshine, and caught from breeze and bird. There were baby roses too, very baby roses, for it was the softest blush of bloom which tinged the fairness of her face. 'Twas vain to say what that face was like, for the joyousness lay on it in a dazzle, like the mirage of a summer day. You saw there was a dimpled chin, that the eyes were blue, and that the light flaxen hair lay dishevelled in loops and bands on her forehead, or hung in loose tresses and waving pendants over her neck; but to classify the face, to say it was classic, or Saxon, or Celtic, was impossible. You might as well try to analyse a sunbeam.

Slender she was, though taller and not so tiny as the mother, yet beside the nieces she looked almost fairy-like, and, compared with their pronounced movements, hers was a floating motion. The country life had not detracted from her native grace and delicacy, but only moulded them into firmness and elasticity.

"Look, he has put himself directly under the mistletoe," she cried out with a laugh, as soon as she was clear of the phalanx of the stalwart nieces, "a regular challenge;" and with this she bounded on her guardian, throwing one arm round his neck, and stroking his head with the other, whilst her kisses fell softly on cheek and forehead. The old man smiled blandly, as though, like Tennyson's oak, he felt his sap stirred, spite of hard wood

and wrinkled rind. Things, however, took a more serious aspect when the nieces all rushed on, shouting out, "Now it's our turn." Very different, indeed, was their vigorous handling and hearty smacks, to the gentle manipulation and caresses he had just undergone. In vain he tried to extricate himself from the toils. At length he effected a diversion by saying, "There's the passon—take the passon—'tis his turn."

And the parson had his turn, we blush to say; but whether the nieces took the parson or the parson took the nieces, would be a question as idle as that of old, whether the codfish took the hook or the hook took the codfish. Anyways, there was kissing under the mistletoe.

By this time a great number of guests had arrived—farmers and their wives, parochial magnates, the farm-labourers, and many a highway and by-way chance-comer besides.

"Now then, dame," said Penrice, "let's have the hearth-cup, and then we'll clear the floor for dancing or games, jest as the young ones like. By-the-by, I promised Master Jones to show Lily's cup to un; he thinks 'tis of more vally than we knows, and you can drink your sweet stuff out ov it. I'll go and fetch un."

Meantime the brother handed round the snuff-box, which resembled a small dressing-case, as a sort of interlude. An Eastern monarch is said to

send a subject whom he wishes to ruin an elephant as a present. This box was almost as mischievous an inheritance, for it had induced the possessor to feed his own nose and the noses of his friends at a most costly expenditure.

The dame and Lily had taken advantage of the interval to have a little conversation *sotto voce* with Jim. That worthy, however, only shook his head mournfully, saying, "No, marm, no letters, nor no news of any sort or kind."

James was rather a strange go-between, but he had been selected as a medium of communication between Tom and his mother from his known honesty and devotion to the former. The dame had hoped that a letter might have brightened even the Christmas festival, and the disappointment seemed to sink deeper into her quiet nature than would have been imagined. It shaded even the joyousness of Lily's face.

Presently old Guy returned, bearing in his hand a sandal-wood box, inlaid with silver, which emitted a delicious fragrance when opened, and the cup was taken from its sanctuary. The cup was of ivory, carved delicately at the foot, and there was a ring of bright and many-coloured stones around the rim. All were surprised at its beauty, and at the brilliancy of the gems, real or not. The yeoman even was astonished, as he had scarcely ever seen it since it was first given into his custody, and

had never taken any particular note of it. "We'll hansom un first, dame, with thy sweet trade, and then the passon can examine un, and let's us have George's horn too."

So Lily's cup, filled with spiced elder wine, surrounded by a little company of glasses of metheglin, went round among the fair drinkers; the buffalo horn, with the tankard as a reservoir, was reserved for the family and neighbours. Cups and jugs of beer and cider were liberally distributed among the company generally. The orchestra had arrived, consisting of two fiddles and flute, led by old Steve Rowell, whose reputation as a musician was so great, that 'twas thought he would have made his fortune in London, only that he never could get beyond a public four miles distant, whenever he made an attempt to reach that place.

The musicians were now called upon to give an accompaniment to the chorus, with which the toast of the hearth-cup was always introduced.

"Now, Bob, pitch the time," said Guy to his brother.

The lead being given, all hands joined in giving—

Here's success to the old roof-tree !

Heigho for the old roof-tree !

Here's to the bounteous, whoever they be !

Heigho for the jovial and free !

Curs'd is the cold heart that dwelleth alone.
Here's to the hearth and the warm hearthstone !
Heigho for the warm hearthstone !

All voices gave the burst of the refrain so heartily and lustily that it made the roof-tree ring again. The toast, of course, was drunk right merrily.

"Now then," said Guy, "let Mister Jones gie his judgment of the cup."

The curate looked at it long and carefully, and then said, "It is my opinion, if these stones are real gems, that the cup is of great value."

"Great valy ! what do you mean by great valy ?" inquired Guy.

"Well, I should think as valuable as the broad lands we saw to-night."

"Of as great valy as Tregarrow, with its tenelements, and messuages, and heriditaments, its pasturages, uplands, and plantashuns ? 'Tis impossible, 'tis impossible."

"Well, perhaps, that would be a little exaggeration, but 'twould be worth a good sum of money."

"Then the gurl's a hairress ! my lagacy a hair-ess ! and I'm sponsible as her guardian ; we must put this away safe if that be the case."

"Yes, mind you do, for I shall be a most ruthless creditor, and shall demand my pound of flesh, guardy," said Lily, playfully.

As the yeoman turned to go away, he met a

most sinister-looking face, which had been peering over his shoulder when the cup was shown. "Halloa, Mister Rich Jope, what has brought you here?"

'Twas an evil-looking fellow he addressed; he had an evil squint, nor was the obliquity confined to the vision, for he squinted all over; there was an obliquity in figure, manner, and gait.

"Why, I thoft bygones was bygones," replied this worthy, "and that everybody was welcome here to-night."

"Well, I never turn nobody from my doors in Christmas times, but the farther off we be, the better friends."

With this Jope slunk off.

"James," said Guy, beckoning the huntsman to him, "see that old Steve and his gang get plenty to keep 'em going."

"I should think," remarked the wag brother, "that being a Rowel, he wouldn't require a spur in the head."

"And, James," continued Guy, "keep your eye on that Rich Jope; he's up to no good."

James thus found himself established as general family factotum and confidant.

"Now, then," shouted the yeoman, as he returned from depositing his trust in safety, "let us have a dance; tune up your pipes, my boys. Now Lily, then, first dance with you. Robert will

take the dame—the girls will passel out the passon among 'em."

The music struck up, and away they went—up the middle and down again, change sides, crissy-crossy—heads bobbing and feet stamping. Sometimes the yeoman's face would be seen gleaming among the rest like a full moon—sometimes a glimpse of the yellow tops would be seen in the interstices of legs—now there would be a tangle and a puzzle, which the nieces set right in a strong-handed way, and then off they'd go again. If it had not been for the propriety and pleasantness of the thing, there might as well have been no music—the dancers mostly ignored it altogether; their steps, too, were most original. If there was little grace, there was much fun. It was very muscular mirth, which delighted to find vent in strong exercise; it was a loud-voiced, noisy, hob-nailed mirth, which delighted in shouts and laughter, and snapping of fingers, and stamping with the heel.

But who shall say what is the true expression of mirth? At any rate, if there be any faith in outward signs, there were merry hearts and happy ones in that revel by the hearthstone of Tre-garrow.

CHAPTER VI.

We must return to the wassailers now—we pick them up in a narrow lane leading from the village to the vicarage. They had taken their usual beat, and had presented their bowl and sung their wassail to those who were likely to appreciate either, or to show their appreciation in what old Kit would consider the orthodox fashion. They were not merry men all, certainly, but seemed rather a melancholy band—very silent and very blue at the nose—not at all like men who had been devoting their energies to the inspiration of the jolly wassail. The fact is, that old Kit had most ruthlessly abided by the established tactics of the fraternity, and had enforced a most rigorous sobriety.

“How foolish ’twud be,” he’d say, “to be a-filling yersels with bread and cheese, and getting boozy on small sour beer, when we’ve the good ating and the good drinking in view at Tregarrow. ’Sides, if we wos to go there a-roaring and screaming, and not ’tending to our chowrus, we shud gie mortal offence to the faarmer.”

So abstinence had been the rule, but it had not improved the tempers or added to the cheerfulness of the party. They were now turning the corner and wending towards the vicarage. Still the same dark female figure followed, hovering round them,

hanging on their skirts, and yet never coming into sight—specially did she shun this as the vicarage stood before them.

"Now, comrades," said Kit, "mind you'm very meek with the song, and very piany with the chowrus, for the passon's nerves be oncommon shaky; and if we'm axed to drink, let's take a drop of some'ut short, for the passon's ale han't got draught enough to be good, and the hollands is very superior. The housekeeper's curranty-cake, too, is to be depended upon."

The members of the bowl brightened up at the thought of even this small whet to their appetites.

As they entered the garden the vicar came forth through the window (which opened on the ground) to receive them. After listening quietly but with evident effort to several verses—which were certainly, according to Kit's caution, given in the mildest form of wassail melody—he stepped forward and said, "Thanks, my friends, thanks for your greeting; but you know I am not fitted now to be a good disciple of the jolly wassail, so you'll excuse me. I must, however, sip the bowl for the sake of old times, and wish you and yours all the happiness of the season." As he sipped he dropped an offering into the bowl, which met even Kit's views of orthodoxy in such matters.

"And now, my friends, good night, and God

bless you," he said, waving his hand. "The house-keeper will be expecting to see you, and she will make you merrier than I can."

As the band trooped off towards the kitchen, that dark figure again stole forth, glided silently towards the window, and looked cautiously into the parlour, where Arthur Versturme stood by the hearth. A long anxious look she took, and then a sigh, a deep wailing sigh, escaped her. At this the vicar looked up, and she glided back as quietly and silently again into the dark shades of the shrubbery. Arthur Versturme mused for a moment, then rubbed his eyes, and then advanced to the window and looked out. "Surely," he said, "I heard a sigh and saw a figure here—it could not be fancy." But there was nought to be seen; and 'twas vain to look for traces in the snow, as the wassailers had trampled it into a maze of footsteps.

"No, it must have been an illusion," he said, as he returned to the hearth, "one of those which spring from a heated brain and weak stomach. I have kept too long a vigil and fasted too much. Yet it seemed so real. Can it be that spirits come back to visit us? Could it be that dear one," looking up at the picture of his wife, "coming from the world of angels to call me—or that poor lost one returning to mourn over the hearth she had made so desolate?—but these are fantasies."

And so he sat, now fighting with these fantasies, now hugging them to his heart, until the house-keeper entered, and forced him back to the materialism of supper.

CHAPTER VII.

We will precede the wassailers and await them at Tregarrow. The feast was spread there, and the guests all seated. One table had been placed across the upper end of the room, and another branched from it down the middle; at the upper sat old Guy, with his relations and friends beside him. From this position he could command a view over all the tables, and see that all his guests were doing justice to his fare. To say the board groaned, would be to use a false metaphor, and to cast an unjust reflection on it. It seemed not in the least inclined to groan, but looked very jolly, covered as it was with goodly viands, and bedecked with laurel and holly berries. It was certainly heavily laden, but bore its burden cheerfully. The sight of that supper would have given Soyer dyspepsia for a month, and have driven Gunter to an asylum a hopeless lunatic. There were rounds of beef and ribs of beef, of wondrous size and fatness; plump hams, goodly to sight and savour; large pies; legs of roast pork, succulent and brown with crackling; huge plum-puddings dark with fruit; cheeses; great

loaves and cakes, all set in tempting array, interspersed with cans of cider and jugs of ale. Round the dame were scattered a few trifles, such as patties, tarts, little bowls of syllabub and cream, and sweet-cakes. These were for her own delectation, and that of Lily and the curate. The yeoman called them the wife's pomps and vanities, and despised them heartily. The nieces, too, were true to the family tastes and the solids. If they renounced the pomps and vanities of the world half so easily as they did those of the *patisserie*, it must have been very gratifying to their godfathers and godmothers. All were now impatient for the arrival of the wassailers to commence operations. Old Penrice sat with his chin just rising over a round of beef—the knife and fork held erect on either side of it, in readiness for work. Seen thus, he looked like some grotesque bit of heraldry; the jovial face was the crest, the round of beef the shield, the carvers the supporters.

Presently a crackling of the snow was heard without.

“Here they come,” cried the yeoman; “shut the doors, quick!”

There was a little dramatic action, it seemed, which must precede the entry of the wassailers. Acting up to it, these worthies turned from the closed doors, and ranged themselves outside the window; a ghostly band they looked, standing in

the cold light—very chill and comfortless as the outs always look to the ins on such occasions. Their outside part was short, yet many a longing glance was cast at the warm hearth and the full board within. The wassail song was now struck up with all the strength of the company. The execution exhibited every degree of nasal twang and nasal energy. These, modulated and organised by a Jullien, might have produced a novel effect; as it was, the individual nose was too prominent and too independent. Thus ran the first verses of their ditty:—

A jolly wassail bowl,
A wassail of good ale;
Well fare the butler's soul
That setteth this to sale.
With our wassail,
Our jolly wassail.

Good Dame here at your door,
Our wassail we begin;
We are all fellows poor,
We pray now let us in,
With our wassail,
Our jolly wassail.

Our wassail we do fill
With apples and with spice;

Then grant us your good will
To taste here once or twice
Of our wassail,
Our jolly wassail.

If any maidens be
Here, dwelling in this house,
They kindly will agree
To take a full carouse
Of our wassail,
Our jolly wassail.

But here they let us stand,
All freezing in the cold ;
Good master, give command
To enter, and be bold,
With our wassail, &c.

Here there was a pause with the minstrelsy, and the yeoman again gave the word. The doors were thrown open, and in rushed the band. Old Penrice chuckled over this bit of pantomime, as though it had been the most cunning stage effect ever invented by Scribe or Planché. The wassailers now formed in procession—Kit, the arch-priest, at the head, the other ministrants following in Indian file—and marched up and took position behind the master's chair. The song was again taken up, and certainly the refrain was given more *con spirito* than before :—

Much joy unto this hall
With us is entered in ;
Our master first of all,
We hope will now begin,
Of our wassail, &c.

The master drank, and then there was a loud
chink in the bowl. Song and cup now passed on
to the dame :—

And after his good wife,
Our spicèd bowl will try ;
The Lord prolong your life ;
Good fortune we espy
For our wassail, &c.

A sip, and another chink ; and on went the bowl
with laugh and cheer through the rest of the com-
pany, the wassail band singing the remaining
verses of their ditty :—

Some bounty from your hands,
Our wassail to maintain ;
We'll buy no house or lands,
With that which we do gain
With our wassail, &c.

It is a noble part,
To bear a liberal mind ;

God bless our master's heart,
For here we comfort find,
With our wassail, &c

And now we must be gone,
To seek out more good cheer,
Where bounty will be shown,
As we have found it here,
With our wassail, &c.

Much joy betide them all ;
Our prayers shall be still,
We hope, and ever shall,
For this your great good will
To our wassail, &c.

The chink-a-chinks in the bowl during the progress had been so numerous that old Kit smiled all over, and was evidently rejoicing in the thought that the dregs of his bowl would not be so bitter as those of festive cups are generally supposed to be. The departure announced in the concluding verses was merely pantomimic, like the entry, and meant only a temporary seclusion in the entrance hall, where the bowl was deposited, and the ministrants then returned in their private character to the supper-table.

The feast now began in right earnest. The yeoman's carving was a sight to see. How he flour-

ished the carvers at each cut ! how the slices fell before his knife like corn before a sickle ! and how he chuckled, as empty plates succeeded full ones in apparently endless succession ! As his labours grew a little lighter, he would stop to take a view of the general operations. Epicure Mammon's sensualism was not larger than his benevolence. He ate with every man's appetite, and drank with every man's draught. A good performance at the trencher he applauded as we would a good hit in a play. At length his eye lit on young Pretty Tommy. His destiny had placed that neophyte opposite a stuffed leg of pork, and some friendly hand had helped him largely from it. How did the young savage devour the savoury meat, making inarticulate sounds the while ! how did he grin with surprise and delight as he sucked crackling, and crushed the brown skin between his teeth, and the unctuous sense stole over his palate ! how recklessly he dashed into the sage and onions ! What a sight he was as he stopped for a minute to breathe and sigh, his face smeared with grease up to the cheek-bones, and his nose even bearing marks of contact with the onions ! His ecstasy reached its climax in a slice of plum-pudding. Crackling and pudding were novelties both to sight and sense. The advantages which more civilised vagabonds have in contemplating such delicacies *à la distance* by flattening their noses against the window of a cook's shop, had

not been his. His was a virgin palate and a virgin taste as far as such things were concerned.

"Lor'! 'tis as good as a play, to see un," said old Guy, going off in a peal of chuckles. "Let un alone now—let un enjoy hisself—don't ye stop un." This last was a monition to Kit, who was endeavouring to check the youth's ardour.

Melody at length succeeded to feasting, and song was the order of the day. A Christmas catch was trolled by Lily and the uncle—the curate giving the bass. The yeoman struck out, in lusty tones, "Speed the plough;" and Lily, by request, sang sweetly and simply "I know a bank whereon the wild thyme," &c., which the yeoman pronounced worth all the modern fol-le-rols, and "the nonsense they was always twaddling nowadays about gazelles and being a butterfly."

James, as in duty bound, gave "Bright chanticleer;" but if he had pursued the fox as feebly in the field as he did in song, there would not have been so many heads on the squire's kennel-door. There was one song in which all joined most unanimously. The burden was a ruthless and vindictive determination to hunt the buffalo, which, if carried into effect, would have led to the extermination of that animal in his native wilds. How the buffalo had provoked this animosity did not appear. In one of the pauses, Jim was observed to look very anxiously out of the window. "Halloa,

James!" cried the host, "what's the matter? you look skeered as if you had seen a ghost—it must be the ghost of a dowg if anything."

"I doan't knaw whether it be the ghost of a dowg or not, but 'tis something nashun queer-looking—'tis more like a fox or a wolf a-glinting in here with his great saucer eyes."

"'Tis the 'Scovy dowg," said young Pretty Tommy, eager to give information, and then sputtering and colouring at finding himself a speaker.

"'Scovy dowg?" said the yeoman, inquiringly.

"Oh," explained old Kit, "young Tommy seed a 'Scovy duck once, and he always thinks everything furrin is 'Scovy. 'Tis a 'Stralian dowg belonging to one of our chaps."

"'Tis a queer one, whatever he be," muttered Jim; and, watching his opportunity, he slid out to reconnoitre the stranger. To his surprise the dog ran down towards him, but in turning round he saw that his master had followed him out. "Is this dowg yourn, my friend?" he said, by way of commencing acquaintance.

"Yes, 'tis," surlily responded sailor Dick.

"Well, he's a queer one as ever I seed. What may he be good for, may I ax?—varmint, or fox, or rabbit?"

"Good for?—why, sheep, kangaroo."

This conversation was not encouraging to James, so he stooped down to make personal acquaintance

with the strange animal. As he did so, sailor Dick laid his hand on his shoulder and whispered in his ear—"Jim, you old stupid, don't you know me?"

"Lor'-a-massy," ejaculated Jim, starting up and trembling all over with surprise and joy—"Lor'-a-massy if it ben't Maister Tom! and to think I should be bothering about an old dowg when you was nist me! but I'm cruel glad to see ye again—cruel glad, sure," and with this he set to wringing him by both hands. "They'll be cruel glad to see ye indoors too. The maister he drink your health, and say 'God bless un' to-night—so come along in, Maister Tom; and you'm looking so brave and hearty, I declare."

"Stop, Jim, I can't show myself yet until I have made one or two little inquiries; so do you go and see if you can make a signal to Lily to come out."

Jim departed on his mission, but turned more than once to wring the prodigal by the hand again. By this time the song in the hall had degenerated into the low comic. Old Kit was in the middle of a facetious and mystic ballad known as "Bung-y'r-eye." The sentiment of it was, that an exciseman having seized on a keg which he supposed contained bung-y'r-eye—the slang term for hollands—on opening it, found a fine young baby inside. Determined to make the best of it, he carried the young foundling to be christened, and gave Bung-y'r-eye as the name of the future Christian, and the gist of the

ballad was the surprise and perplexity of the parson at receiving such a baptismal denomination. After a while the mirth began evidently to slacken—the yeoman ceased to fill his cup—the dame gave little winks and starts at intervals—and the nieces were caught in most unmistakable yawns. "Come, then," said old Guy, "pass round the tankard once more before we part, and as 'tis well on in the Christmas morn we'll have a curl" (carol, *Anglicè*). "Let Lily begin: but where's Lily?" Lily had disappeared. The alarm caused by her absence was soon absorbed in a greater one—a shrill female voice was heard shrieking out, "Fire! fire!" and in a few minutes James came in, pale and ghastly, shouting out, "Maister, maister, the thatch be a-fire!"

CHAPTER VIII.

And where was Lily? ah! where was Lily? The salts of the earth, the great priestesses of propriety, would have blushed to see her—the Martineaus would have pitied, perhaps lectured on her. "Fie, fie! Lily!" There she sat in the summer-house with her head resting on the prodigal Tom's shoulder, her light locks tangling with his bushy whiskers, and her eyes looking up at him. "Shame on you, Lily!" Strange to say, Lily, in her innocence and simplicity, did not feel

her own depravity. Shamed! why should she feel ashamed? ashamed at laying her head on dear old Tom's shoulder—old Tom, whom she had loved as a child, loved as a girl, loved as a woman; whom she had loved naturally without going through any spasmodic sensations, or experiencing any sudden sympathetic influences. Instead of being ashamed, she seemed to be well pleased with her position, and was making a little purring noise expressive of extreme satisfaction. "So he's come back—the dear, dear old Tom; and how we've been longing to see his dear face again! We did hope for a letter, and I thought one had come when James beckoned me out; but to think of its being dear old Tom himself! What a shame of you, though, to steal upon us in disguise, just like the knights when they came back to their castles from the wars dressed like palmers or minstrels!"

"My disguise was more of the gaberlunzie stamp, I think, and more fitting a rough old sheep-feeder. However, I didn't repent my little bit of masquerading, for didn't it give me an opportunity of sitting quietly looking at the dear group—of looking at my Lily grown lovelier than ever—at the dear old father beaming with heartiness as usual, amid the joints and the cans—and at the dear mother too, placid and sweet as of old. I thought, though, that she looked a little pensive."

"Yes, Tom, she has pined a good deal at your

absence, and the father too has fretted a good deal: your return will be joy to his heart spite of all that's past—I know he prays nightly that he may live to see it; but you know he will expect you to appear in the character of a prodigal, very famine-stricken and very penitent."

"What an impostor I should be in the character of a prodigal!" said Tom, laughing and looking down over his broad frame and lusty limbs. "Do I look like a prodigal?"

Lily thought not. As she looked in his face she saw no sign there of riotous living—of feeding with swine—no sign of the remorse begotten of sin and famine; she saw nothing but manliness and honesty in that broad open brow and the deep blue eyes—nothing save the will of endeavour in the firm lip and strong chin. No; she felt instinctively, as she looked, that he had come back heart-sound—the same good, strong, gentle, honest Tom as ever.

"No, Lily, I shall never pass for a prodigal—or a famine-stricken one, at any rate. Why, I'm strong as a young lion, and have health enough to stock a whole college of physicians. There's an arm, a pretty thing that to put around a girl's waist."

Lily did not altogether seem to perceive the incongruity of such a proceeding.

"But there were other reasons, Lily, why I wished to see you and make inquiries before I appeared in character—they related to poor Emily."

"Why, you don't mean, Tom, that you have seen or found out anything about her! Oh! do, do tell me."

"Softly, softly, my little fairy; I have grown a methodical old fellow, and must go on regularly with my story, and let one part lead to another. I must tell somewhat first of my own doings, my Lily."

"Yes, yes, tell me all—all your adventures—all your story from beginning to end."

"Well, there is not much adventure in it; but I must tell just as much as will explain what follows."

Lily nestled herself on his shoulder, half listening, half wrapt in the sense of enjoying his presence.

"You will recollect, from my letters," commenced Tom, fumbling with his pipe, and then, as he looked at his delicate Lily, hastily putting it back into his pocket, "how, soon after my arrival at Sydney, I met with the owner of one of the largest sheep-farms in the country, and how he offered me to become a sort of partner, paying in a small capital and making up the rest by labour. This suited me well, as I wished to reserve my money until I could see my way to a good investment, and I wished, too, to get a large experience in my future work. The farm was a long way off, far away in the bush—far away from all civilisation—a very lonesome place. My partner, or rather master, stuck most

rigorously to his bargain; he was a severe task-master, and exacted his pound of flesh to the ounce. I now began to know what work was. I thought that I had worked hard at Tregarrow, but that was nothing. I could take off my coat and put it on as I liked, go in for a spell of work as an excitement; and then there was behind all the plentiful larder and the cheerful hearth. Now I found out what it was to toil—toil incessantly, body and mind, with little respite, little rest, and with very poor and irregular food. However, it seemed to agree with me; it kept me in fine health and out of all harm—made me think and act for myself. The nature of the work, too, seemed to draw out my powers and give me more self-reliance. The difficulties and hardships, too, which I underwent, made me ashamed of the trifles and mole-hills at which I used to grumble and stumble. 'Twas a good life to make a man, still 'twas a hard life; and I don't know what I should have done without the few books you lent me. They were a great solace in the lone nights sometimes spent in the bush, sometimes in a shepherd's hut, or in the lone room at home—my only solace except the pipe. No! you need not look up,—I had no other. I am almost a water-drinker now, and shall be a most degenerate inheritor of the tankard."

"Then you shall change with the uncle, and have the snuff-box, Tom," said Lily.

“It will be as useful to me as the other. The abstinence from all spirits, however, was a blessing to me. It was a lesson from the old partner, and the best he ever gave. ‘Young fellow, whilst you have strength,’ he said, ‘never yield to stimulants. I did so, and see what I have come to,—used up, worn out before my time. I am a warning for you. And a terrible one he was. He had taken fearfully to drink of late, and at the end of the twelve months his mind and strength were so impaired that he was not equal to any business, even of the most trifling kind. So, after a good deal of hesitation, he resolved to retire, and offered me the property and stock. The offer was a fair one, and as I now felt myself equal to the position, I accepted it. I was now my own master—a large proprietor. My labours, however, were not decreased—head-work, anxiety, responsibility, were all doubled. I was in a position which taxed me to the utmost. Things, however, went well with me; my walks were soon enlarged—my flocks multiplied, and my shepherds were like a little regiment. I was fast growing rich. About this time your letters began to tell of the old man’s beginning to pine and fret about me, and of his longings for my return. This thought haunted me. Ever I saw before me the dear old man drooping and dispirited. The memory of the old hearth and all around it grew stronger and stronger, until I could think of nought besides.

Now, too, a great dread seized upon me. I began to feel that the love of gain was growing within me, and I feared lest the curse of gold should eat into my heart. You know how I always shuddered at such a fate, and how we used to talk over the misery, and how the old father used to say that a cold heart and grasping hand were the greatest curses which could befall a man. So I resolved to tear it up ere it gained too firm a foothold and had become my master. I felt that I had done enough to prove myself—enough to show myself capable of achieving a purpose—capable of independent action. Time enough, too, had elapsed for the little estrangement betwixt me and the dear old father to pass away, and for the old love to return. I had grown wiser, too, and knew that I could make a happier future for him. So, after thinking it over for a night or two, my mind was made up—I would return home. Next day I started for the house of a proprietor at some distance, whose brother I knew was looking out eagerly for an investment. The bargain was soon struck. 'Twas an easy one on my side. On my return I was overtaken by one of the terrific storms so common in that country. The rain blinded me, the gusts of wind drove my horse almost off his legs, and the thunder and lightning made him shake in every limb; so I was obliged to get off and lead him. We soon lost our way, and stumbled about until

the bush grew thicker and thicker, and there seemed no path or way out whatever. At last, however, I hit suddenly on a sort of clearing, and there, in the middle of it, stood a better sort of shepherd's hut, though 'twas a poor place, after all. After I had knocked several times, a wretched creature, ragged, dishevelled, and begrimed with dirt, came to the door. 'Och, what are ye awanting on?' he said, gruffly. 'Wanting?' I answered, pointing to the sky; 'why, shelter for myself and horse.' 'Shelter, is it? then ye'll find it in the shed yonder; and ye'd better stay with yer horse, he'll be better company than them's inside; there's worse nor the thunder and lightning here.' Notwithstanding this warning, I returned, and, after making a half-forcible entry, found myself inside. 'Twas certainly a miserable place, squalid with dirt and meanness. The only furniture was a few rickety chairs and a coarse deal table; some sheepskins lay about in corners, and a few sticks were burning on the hearth, over which a tin pot was simmering. Over the chimney were some firearms and powder-horns, but they looked rusty and neglected. 'Well, now ye're in, ye may sit down, if ye plaze; but ye'll be repenting afore long, and wishing yerself outside the dour agin. Och, there, I tould ye so.' At that moment a fearful yell came from the inner room, followed by most horrible curses and blasphemy. 'Good God!' I said, 'what's that?' 'Och, sure,'

said the shepherd, unconcernedly, 'it's only the master; it's jist the time for his divils to come.' 'Devils!' I said. 'Oh yis, the divils; he's mighty dilerus the day, and thinks when he wakes that there's a pack of divils come to tormint and car him off.' 'But surely,' I said, 'you should send for a doctor and clergyman.' 'Doether, is it? and where wald ye find one to come? and maybe have a bottle thrown at his head; and as fur a praist, begad he'd sooner have the divils.' 'Can I go and see if I can be of help?' 'Och, ye may come; but ye're better whare ye are; I'm jist going to car him the dhrink.' So I followed into a room, if possible more wretched than the other; and there, in the corner, on a rude pallet, with a dirty rug as his only covering, lay a man howling now, gesticulating with all his might. He was a fearful, a piteous sight. His long bare arms, lying outside the rug, were worn down to bone and muscle; his long hair was matted and tangled, and hung down over his face. He was evidently young, but riot and disease had told fearfully on him. His eyes were sunken and bloodshot, his cheeks hollow, and his features altogether most ghastly. As the shepherd entered, he turned and yelled at him: 'Well, devil's stoker, have you been heating the pincers, eh? I'm sure the devil employs you to torment me.' 'Och, be asy, master, dear,' said the shepherd, soothingly; 'here's a jontleman come to see ye.' 'A gentle-

man!—oh, that's another of them'—and here he turned and glared fiercely at me for a few minutes, then yelled out louder than ever—'Oh, it's Tom Penrice, is it?—so you are turned devil's bailiff, are you, Tom?' 'Good God!' I said, as a sudden recognition burst on me; 'it can't be Harry Rankin?' 'Yes, it is Harry Rankin,' he yelled again, with an oath; 'and why shouldn't it be? how did you expect to find him?—not well and happy, I suppose?—the devils wouldn't stand that: but you shan't take me yet, Tom: stand off—my time isn't come yet; I've something to say and do before I go. They send all kinds of messengers for me, though. Who do you think they sent last? Why, the baby—Emily's baby, you know—the one that died; but it had a ring of gold light round its head—I don't think it could have come from the devil—do you? Then there's the vicar—he comes oftenest. Curse him—curse him, I say; but for his cursed pride and prudery I shouldn't have come to this: he spurned me—he scorned me, didn't he?—he spurned me from his door—made me feel a coward!—but I've had my revenge. I laid a slow burning fire in his heart; but 'tis hotter here, Tom'—striking his breast—'hotter here!'—and then he went off into incoherent curses and howlings until he fell exhausted on the pallet.

"'Now thin,' said the Irish shepherd, 'ye'll get no sinse from him for one while; so if ye're his

frind, ye'd better be fetching the docther or spak-
ing to the praist.'

"Having ascertained really where I was, I recollected that some miles distant lived a young fellow who had come out to the country as a medical practitioner, and, finding that unprofitable, had taken to farming; and as the storm had abated, I determined to set out for him.

"He readily consented to return with me, but 'twas night ere we arrived, and the stars were shining down brightly on the hut and all its wretchedness. When we entered, Harry was lying quite quiet—the eyes were even more sunken now; there was a deadly pallor on his face, and drops of cold sweat stood on his brow. The doctor said he was in a state of collapse, and that though he might rally from this, and be rational for a while, that there was no ultimate hope for him, and that his days—nay, his hours—were numbered. He then proceeded to bathe his brow and administer some brandy from a bottle which stood on the table. After a time he revived a little, opened his eyes and looked round on me with a wild and bewildered gaze. When I spoke to him, however, and placed my hand on him, he seemed to gather up his senses. 'Ah, is it really you, Tom?' he said, in a hollow feeble voice; 'I thought 'twas a dream. Surely a Providence sent you, Tom. Oh, Tom, I wished so much to do justice to poor Emily before

I died, and you have come in time to hear all. This takes a terrible load from my heart, for you will right her, I know you will. Poor, poor Emily, how I have wronged her!—what a ruffian—what a liar have I been to her, Tom! And yet one time it might have been so different. I often think though, that if the vicar had not scorned me so, all would have been well. I should have grown a different man under Emily's influence, and we might have been happy after all. From the time he spurned me I thought of nothing except revenge: my hatred towards him was stronger than my love to Emily. 'Twas long, however, before I could get her consent to elope, and 'twas only when I promised faithfully that the instant we were married we would come back and ask pardon. So she went and we were married—really married. Then I persuaded her to write before we went back—but I intercepted the letter. She wrote again, and again, and these letters were also stopped; so, of course, no answer came. Mortified by the coldness and silence of her father, and sick with despair, she consented at last to go to Australia and begin a new life, under new auspices. Well, after we came here, things went better, and I stuck to my work and my home. Soon, however, I fell in with the old set, and into the old ways. Emily tried hard to wean me, but 'twas no use; I grew worse and worse. Then our first child died, and

that startled me back from my courses. 'Twas only for a while, however. So things went on until two years had passed, and another child was born to us ; but nothing had effect on me ; drink, drink—gamble, gamble—was all I thought of. Emily now began to lose patience, and would taunt me and speak in her proud way, and this would madden me so, that I have struck her—yes, Tom—often struck her. Still she stayed by me, though God knows my house was then no place for her. One night, however, mad with days of drinking, and aggravated by something she said, I told her—God forgive me !—that our marriage was a sham one, that she was not my wife, and that her child was a bastard. With that she rose up, looked at me as her father had done, took up her child, and left the room. Next morning I went away early, not daring to face her ; but when I returned she was gone—gone with her child, and I could get no trace of her. Some months after this I received a letter from her, giving the address of a milliner, beseeching me to tell whether my terrible words were true or not. I never answered it. After she had gone I did nothing but drink : I was always drunk or drinking : I felt that I was killing myself, yet kept ever feeding the fire. But the fire of the blood and the brain was nothing to the fire of the heart, Tom. At last I could bear it no longer, my conscience stung me so ; and I set out in search of

Emily, to tell her the truth, and see her once more. I had got thus far on my way, when I was taken with one of my attacks; and that devil's stoker, that Irish fellow, gave me brandy instead of keeping it from me, and that finished me. It is a terrible end, Tom, isn't it? But my strength is going, and I must come to the end. Put your hand under my pillow, Tom, and take out the box that's there. The certificate of marriage is there, and Emily's letters which she wrote to her father; and there is also my will, giving her all that's left—not much, but enough to take her home and keep her for some time in comfort. Now you must deliver these to her, if she is still alive—promise me that for the sake of old times.' 'Yes, yes,' I said, 'I will; but how shall I find her? What clue have I to seek her by?' 'There is that address she gave, in the box, and Dingo. Dingo there,' pointing to one of the country dogs which lay by the bed, 'will be a great help, a good guide; he was very fond of her, and would know her at once anywhere. But you will find her, Tom; God will guide you; He has sent you here. Poor Emily! I should have wished to ask her forgiveness—but there are so many I ought to ask forgiveness of!' His voice now was getting feebler, and his utterance more irregular. After a pause, he said—'Tom, do you think you could say a prayer?' So I knelt and began the Lord's Prayer;

when I came to 'forgive us,' I thought that he was trying to repeat the words, but utterance failed him. And my prayer was scarcely ended, when a strong cold shudder shook his frame; there was a gurgle in the throat, and all was over. This was the last of poor Harry Rankin."

Lily was trembling and sobbing in his arms now—"Oh, 'twas terrible, Tom—too terrible!"

"Yes, Lily, 'twas a fearful scene—very fearful to think of."

"When the doctor left me to fetch a nurse or watcher, I was alone, except Dingo, for the Irish shepherd had disappeared, carrying off, I suppose, what little plunder there was. I tried hard to think of Harry as he had been in his youth and prime, but that poor, haggard, worn, remorseful face haunted me, and a sort of fascination drew my eyes always to the bed. 'Twas a sad weary watch, and I was relieved when it was over. I stayed in the neighbourhood long enough to see him buried, and to take such steps that the property left might be made available for Emily, and then started for Sydney to commence my search for her, and to arrange about my own departure.

"Well, for a long time my search was all vain. The milliner had seen nothing of Emily for months, but had heard that she and her child had been ill, and that she had been seen at the pawnbroker's. I watched these places, and all the resorts of the

poor, equally without success. One night, however, as I was returning from one of the suburbs to the town, I had turned round to look at the moonlight, when a woman, slightly and shabbily dressed, passed by me. There was something in the figure which made my heart beat. An instant after Dingo rushed towards her, gave a joyous bark, and began jumping and leaping upon her. I was certain now, so I went up and said, 'Oh, Emily, I am so glad that I have found you. I have been looking for you so long.' Her impulse at first seemed to be to run away, and then she stopped and turned upon me with one of her cold, fixed looks. 'I know,' she said, 'why you seek me; the presence of that dog tells the story; so come with me and let me hear all.' So we went on together, she trying to walk firm, but shaking and staggering at every step. 'Twas a poor house she led me into, and her garret must have been the worst room in it. It had a very poverty-stricken look. 'Twas very cold and bare. On a little bed lay a poor, sick, wailing child, suffering apparently as much from want of nurture as from illness. 'Now, then,' she said, with the same tone and look, 'I see by your face he is dead—it is all over; now tell me all.' And I did, softening the scene as much as possible. At first she tried to seem firm and strong, but nature was too much for her, and at last she burst out into violent weeping;

she was thinking more then of the lover of her youth than of the brutal husband. When she'd come to a little, I told her of the marriage certificate. Good gracious, Lily, I never expected the effect this had on her. She sprang up—gave a great shout—then seized me by the arm and said, quite fiercely, 'Tom, Tom, is this true? you are not deceiving me!' 'Deceiving you,' I said; 'look, here is the certificate.' She took it eagerly and read it over then, as if a great curse had fallen from her; she lifted up her hands and cried aloud, 'God, I thank Thee for this—I thank Thee for this hour;' next she rushed to the bed, took up the child, kissed it, and cried over it, saying, 'Then you are true born, my darling—you are no bastard.' It seemed dearer to her for that thought. 'Now, Tom,' she said, 'I can go home. I can carry penitence and error to his hearth, not shame. I can say to him now, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and against thee." Now I can place that child in his arms. He will have forgotten his sternness now.' 'He never was stern—never cold,' I said, and then I showed her the intercepted letters. At first her eyes flashed at the treason, and then the knowledge that her father had not turned from his daughter comforted her, and I left her in a happy calm, praying. Next morning it was arranged that I should go back to settle her affairs and my own,

and that she should go home in a ship about to sail in a few days, with a good, matronly old lady who was also homeward bound. I did not sail for more than a week after. We had agreed at parting that whoever arrived first should come here before breaking the matter to the vicar. That was the meaning of my masquerade. I wanted to know if she was come before I showed myself. To-morrow I will go to her old nurse's in the village to see if she has been there—and then, when I have spent the Christmas with the old father by the old hearth, I will start for Liverpool to know what has become of the ship."

"Oh, Tom—how strange, if you should both come home the same day, and bring joy to two hearths."

'Twas at this turn in the conference that the question had arisen in the hall, "Where's Lily?" and now, too, fell on their ears the same shrill cry of fire.

"Run in, Lily," said Tom; "Jim, go and warn the father that the thatch is in a blaze, and I'll ring the alarm-bell."

CHAPTER IX.

Fire! it is always a fearful sound—most fearful when it scares sleepers in their beds, or falls on the ears of those who have gone down to the sea in

ships ; yet it was fearful enough now—to still the mirth of the revellers, to blanch the faces of women, and make men's hearts beat thick. At first there was a great hush, a dead silence, and then arose a babel of noises, of shrieks and voices, and then there was a great rush for all the doors.

On coming outside, it was seen that the thatch on the eastern end of the roof, the farthest from the dove-cot, had caught, or been set on fire. The flames had not much mastery as yet, on account of the snow on the thatch, but whenever they caught one of the old dry rafters beneath, there would be a loud crackle and a burst, and a shower of sparks would flash like stars in the sky, and burning brands shoot up like sky-rockets into the air ; great clouds of smoke, thick and murky, rolled away in heavy masses—threatening signs of the latent power of the fire. All was confusion at first ; men moved about in a sort of bewilderment ; every one gave orders or advice, or asked questions ; none seemed to think of action. It is at such a time that a man with presence of mind and will may step forth at once to take command and leadership. Sailor Dick was now the man of the occasion. "Come, along, lads," said he, "let's to work, gaping and holloaing won't put out the fire. I am an old fireman, so just heed me : now all you thatchers bring ladders and hatchets, and make a great gap in the roof before the flames, so as to

kill the fire ; you labourers, get tarpaulins and wet blankets to spread over the stacks and ricks, and you had better take out the cattle to the field sheds if there be any ; you wassailers, get every bucket and pail you can, break the ice in the pond, and hand up water as fast as you can—water will be more precious than wine or brandy to-night.”

Every one recognised at once the reasonableness of these orders, and set about to carry them out.

“There should be a captain to every gang,” continued he : “I’ll lead the firemen on the roof.”

“I’ll be captain of the bucket brigade,” said old Kit.

“And in coose,” added old Robin Lob the hind, who felt himself equal to acting, now that he was under directions, “I’ll look arter the stacks and the beastes ; there’s a little ingin too, which was in bravish order some months back.” “Well, I’ll take charge of he,” said Jim. The dame, hearing the directions given, moved quietly to issue all the things required—buckets and pails were haled forth in numbers ; and what a store of blankets she had, without touching a bed ! such a store enough to wrap and warm many forthcoming generations of Penrices. The work thus organised soon showed progress. The preliminary precautions were speedily carried out ; wet cloths were thrown on the ricks, and men stood at the nearest points with buckets ready to quench the first spark

at once. Luckily there was little wind, and that little blew from the mowey. Every one was doing something. The curate, like a good muscular Christian, had taken off his coat and become an energetic drawer of water—the wassailers were passing the buckets as though they had been cans of beer. James and his engine were rather a failure. It never got beyond a threat of water, or a little virulent spirt over the men on the roof. Still the fire burnt fiercely on the thatch; it had hold of the dry wood of the rafters now, and fierce-forked flames shot up vengefully amid the thick smoke. The firemen were, however, making strong head against it, and had already made a little chasm between it and them. Aid, too, was coming in now in all directions. The villagers had heard the alarm, and were appearing in force. Sailor Dick said he wished there were fewer hands and more buckets, or that he could turn some of the new comers into pails or water-butts.

One man alone was unhelping and helpless; this was Guy Penrice. He seemed quite stupefied and overwhelmed by the event, and stood gazing vacantly, muttering at times, "burnt out like an ould badger; my roof-tree gone over my head. 'Twas all along of my bragging 'bout the thatch—all along of my fatness of heart, as the curate said."

The dame having done her part had come back, and was trying to rouse and comfort him. "Look,

Guy," she said, "the men are driving the flames backward now, and there won't be much hurt."

This drew his attention to the point where the fire was most powerful, and which happened to be just over the turret. An idea at once seemed to seize him—"Not much hurt? why, my chamber is all a-blaze, and the papers will be burnt; the deeds and the titles, and there's the girl's cup—worth all Tregarrow, and I'm trustee for her—if he goes I'm a ruined man." This last thought seemed to rouse him with a sudden impulse, and, jamming his hat down over his head, he rushed forward to enter the house. The dame tried to stop him, but he broke easily from her and was soon lost in the gloom and the smoke, leaving her wringing her hands and imploring help. Lily, meanwhile, had gone to the foot of the ladder and called down Tom. "Good God," said he, when Lily told what had occurred, "the dear old man will go stumbling about in all this smother, and fall, and with his weight be suffocated. He is gone up the big staircase too—I must after him and let the roof take its chance. Who'll come with me?"

"I," said Jim, who had relinquished the engine as an unprofitable command—"I'll follow wherever you go, Maister Tom."

Lily's heart failed her almost as she saw these two dash also into the midst of the fire.

Meanwhile the vicar had arrived. He had gone

to his observatory before going to bed as usual, had seen something extraordinary about Tregarrow, had saddled his pony and come on at once, giving the alarm as he came. He was comforting the dame now.

"Oh! he will be stifled, suffocated, he is so stout, and he has gone the long way by the great staircase."

"But the men went in close after him, and must find him before harm can come. But what made him so rash as to rush into such danger?" said the vicar.

The group was standing now by the turret, and hiding in the shadow of it was the dark female figure we have seen so often to-night. At first her object seemed only to look and gaze on the different faces and figures; but as the conversation went on, she strained forward to catch every word.

"Oh, you know the curate was saying something about the cup—the cup that came with Lily, and 'twas brought down, and the curate awoke it, and said 'twas of as great vally as all Tregarrow; and now to-night, when poor Guy saw the fire burning so fiercely over the chamber where 'twas kept, he cried out that it and the title-deeds would be burned, and that he should be ruined and dishonoured for breach of trust, and he rushed away like mad."

"'Twas an unlucky occurrence, but 'twas just

like him. However, we shall soon hear what has happened; meantime, let us hope and trust."

There was a lull now; the workmen had heard that the yeoman was in the house, and nothing could be done whilst his safety was doubtful. How long the moments seemed! How suspicious was every sound! Every crack in the rafters was supposed to be shriek or groan—every gust of smoke a holloa. At last young Pretty Tommy, who had established himself as a vedette at the foot of the staircase, rushed out shouting, "They'm coming, they've got un!" "Thank God—thank God," was the universal exclamation. Presently the two men emerged from the house, bearing the yeoman between them, apparently senseless and lifeless. There was a rush made at once towards him, but the vicar motioned every one back, saying that the throng would oppress and keep the air from him. The dame already had her arms round him, and was murmuring, "Guy, Guy—my dear Guy—my dear old husband, can't you speak—oh, you are not hurt—he is not dead?" "No, marm," says James, "he've only swounded. Hadn't we better," he added, turning to the vicar, "take un more into the open and out of the way; up by the arbour perhaps would be best place."

"Yes, James is right," said the vicar, who had meanwhile been feeling his heart and pulse; "he is only in a swoon. Get a chair and take him up

to the harbour. I know something of the doctor's art, and hope we'll soon bring him to."

Sailor Dick had relinquished his charge now, and returned to see how affairs were progressing on the roof. The men seemed at last to have baffled and to be conquering the fire. There was now a yawning gap between it and the flames, where there was nought to feed it; and on the edge of this it was burning feebly and fitfully, merely throwing out spiteful tongues at the charred rafters. At the end near the chimney, however, it was still in force, and there now all the man-power and water-power were being concentrated.

Sailor Dick, or rather, Tom, seeing that things were going on well, skirted along the privet hedge and gained the chestnut shade, whence he could look out on the group centred round the yeoman.

Young Pretty Tommy was standing in the court as the yeoman was borne off, open-mouthed in astonishment at all the events of the night, when the same dark figure glided from behind the turret, and the woman touched him on the shoulder, saying, "Now, Tommy, if you wish to do the farmer a good turn, come with me." Tommy followed mechanically as she led him round the back of the buildings, and in through a back court. "Take up this crow-bar," said she, "and I will take a lanthorn in case we should want it, though there seems light enough up there."

"Please, young woman," said Tommy, at this point, "here's this 'Stralian dowg a-follaring us ; is he to go?"

"Yes," said she, "Dingo comes with us."

On they went now through the back kitchen, and up a little back stair, making their way with difficulty, for the rafters were cracking over their heads, and the smoke burst upon them in fierce gusts. At length they reached a door, which she seemed surprised to find open : through it they entered a small chamber. In truth there was light enough here, for ever and anon the flames shot and leapt fiercely through it. "Here it is," said the woman, going up to a desk in the corner. "Come here, Tommy, and break this open : here are the things the farmer wants." As she spoke she touched the lid, which lifted at once with her hand. A glance within was enough to show that it was empty.

"O God!" she cried, "some one has been here before us—some thief for plunder." At this moment Dingo gave an angry growl, and made a fierce leap forward. A man at the same time rushed past them. "Hey, Dingo!" said the woman ; "come Tommy." But they had to grope now in the smoke and fire, for the thief had shut the door on them, though Dingo had passed through after him. Half-scorched, half-suffocated, they found the door just in time ; for the floor was beginning to glow beneath their feet, and Tommy would have fainted,

but for the woman's support. All the time they heard Dingo's growls ; and on reaching the foot of the stairs, found him standing over a prostrate man, and holding him by the throat. The man had stumbled from haste, or fright, and there lay at the dog's mercy. A large tin box had dropped from his hand as he fell, and now lay on the floor. The woman eagerly seized upon it, saying, " this is partly what we want, but there is something more."

" Lor !" said pretty Tommy, looking down on the thief, " if it ben't Rich Jope."

" For God's sake take off this cussed dowg," gasped Jope, half-throttled, half-dead with terror.

" Back, Dingo !" said the woman, and the dog quitted his hold of the throat, but still stood close, grinding his teeth, and glaring at his enemy. " Now, give up the box with the cup, or I'll set the dog on again."

" Cup ! what cup ?—what box ? I ha'n't got no cup nor box," growled Jope, doggedly.

" Then seize him, Dingo," she cried. At this the wretch sprang to his feet with an agonized shriek, and brought out the box from beneath his coat, and presented it to the woman, begging and praying that she would take away the dog and let him off.

" Here, Tommy," she said, " carry these to the farmer ; give them to none but himself, and you are made for life." Then turning round to the dog, she pointed to the man, and said, " Keep, Dingo."

“What! you surely ben’t going to leave me alone with the dowlg!” shrieked Jope. “For massy’s sake take un away, take un away,” and he sobbed aloud in his terror. But the woman turned away inexorable, and glided off in the same direction as Tom had gone. So the dog and Jope stood alone. In vain did Jope summon courage to make a rush by him, or to hazard an attack; the remembrance of the teeth at his throat, of the hot breath on his face, and the glaring eyes, had quite unmanned him, so he moved helplessly to and fro, the dog following and keeping his eye fixed on him. At last he saw a small door, leading out of the backlet. Thinking this might be a means of escape, he made a frantic rush for it, and found himself in a small court, enclosed by four walls, a perfect *cul de sac*, and there in the door stood his keeper. He sank now into perfect despair, then he affected to sleep, but the instant he moved he saw the eyes glowing upon him as watchfully as ever. Then he would creep cautiously round the walls, hoping to find some place where they could be scaled, till a loud growl would warn him back; then he tried coaxing, but this was not a Cerberus to take a sop; and then he would fall back on the wall in a deadly sweat. Thus they stood—the man and dog—the watcher and the watched—and Jope felt himself as much in custody as if there had been handcuffs on his wrists and shackles on his legs.

Return we now to look after the yeoman. Gentle hearts and kind hands were tending him. He had been placed in a large chair at the foot of the knowl; his shirt and neckcloth had been loosed; the dame was bathing his forehead—Lily chafing his neck and hands—the vicar administering a restorative. Every now and then he showed signs of returning animation; gave a loud sigh, would open his eyes for a moment without recognising the loved faces, and then sink back into stupor. After a time, roused by the stimulant given by the vicar, he started and sat upright in his chair, looking rather wildly round, seemingly for some one he missed. "Where's Tom?" he said at length, turning towards the dame; "where's Tom?"

"Oh, Guy, dear," she answered, soothingly, "Tom will come, you know, by-and-by."

"Only wandering a little," whispered the vicar, as he felt his pulse, and attempted to give him more stimulant.

"No, vicar, I ben't wandering, and I don't want no more of that trade," said old Guy, stoutly. "Han't I seed un, and tho'f I was in a swound? didn't I hear his voice? didn't I hear un say, 'take care of his dear old head, Jim, and you lift his legs'? and didn't I feel his arms around me, hoisting me up like a young giant as he wos. 'Twan't James, or fifty Jameses, could car me out like that. Again, I say, where's Tom? why isn't he here?"

"Here I am, father," said Tom, as he emerged from the chestnut; and, rushing forward, to the astonishment of the group, stooped over the old man. "Here, I am father, dear old father, come back to ask your forgiveness."

Old Guy stared for a moment, as though scared by the apparition he had conjured up; then realising it all, and overcome altogether by emotion, he fell on his son's neck, and kissed him. "Forgiveness!" sobbed he, "yes; we'll both forgive and forget." The dame now put forward her claim to the neck and the kisses; and even Lily, the rogue, made hers also, as though she had not her share already. When once it was whispered that Tom was returned, welcomes came in from all quarters. After the enthusiasm of all these welcomes and greetings, the caresses and the wonder, had somewhat subsided, the old man called his son to him.

"Tom," said he, softly, "how is the fire?"

"Oh, it's nearly got under; there is a little blaze still, but 'tis good as out, so we ain't burnt out this time, father."

"No, Tom, and we'll slaat the house now." The old man said this with the air of one who had made a great sacrifice of principle. "But 'twern't that I was thinking of, 'twos of the deeds and the girl's cup—they'm burnt, depend on it; they was in the chamber where the fire first caught, and that cup, they say, was equal in vally to the farm, and I

was trustee. There's lands gone and name gone, Tom."

"Oh, Guardy, Guardy," said Lily, who overheard this, "why will you fret about that miserable cup? I believe the curate was only joking, and if he wasn't, why, what was mine is yours; haven't you cared for me, and loved me all these long years, and made me as your daughter, and why will you look upon me as an alien now, Guardy, with separate property and separate interests?"

"'Tisn't that, Lily, 'tisn't that, 'tis the trust. I must be good to my trust."

"Well, well father," said Tom, "don't fret; perhaps we shall find this box yet among the ashes: and if the worst come to the worst, Australian fleeces didn't sell for nothing, and we can pay off Miss Lily in full without being quite driven to the poorhouse."

"I'd rather pay it in kind, give un back as I got un," muttered the yeoman, still clinging to the old thought.

At this moment there was a hubbub in front, and the body of the wassailers were seen half-hustling, half-carrying forward, the neophyte, young Tommy, who was rebutting all aid or patronage, and was insisting on going straight to the maister. If the ludicrous could have prevailed at that time, his appearance would have excited a strong sense of it. His hair was singed at the ends, his eyebrows burnt off, his face grimed with smoke, one coat tail

had been torn off, and the comforter twisted round under his ear. There was, too, a general sense of fire and smoke about him. The poor fellow was a lamentable figure ; he had suffered bodily, too, for his hands were blistered ; and he tottered, almost fell, as he thrust the two boxes into the yeoman's hands, saying, "There they be, maister, all right, as the young 'oman gied 'm to me."

The old man stared at them for a while, as though he could scarcely believe his senses ; then eagerly opening and looking at them, took Tom's hand and said, "Thank God, they are all safe, and there's no fear now of poorhouse or breach of trust."

"But how did you com by 'em, Tommy ?"

"Why, maister, you know, the young 'oman wot follared the wassailers, she says to me, 'Tommy,' says she (here Tom and Lily exchanged looks), 'if you wishes to do the faarmer a good turn, come wi' me ;' so I goes wi' her, and we goes up a dark steer and comes to the room where the fire was, and the young 'oman goes to a desk, and the desk was broke, then a man busts out from behind, and the 'Stralian dowg chivied un, and we was a'most sifflicated there ; and when we gets out the dowg had pinned the man in the backlet, and 'twas Rich Joep. The young 'oman she makes un gie up the boxes, and then she gies um to me, and tells me to take 'em to the maister, which I does."

"And where is Rich Joep, Tommy ?"

"Oh, the dowg, he's a keping ov un, and purty close too."

Tommy, who had given out this narrative in gasps and spasms, now fainted away, overcome by the exhaustion and strangeness of the night's work. He was, however, soon restored. The yeoman, now happy beyond happiness, joyous beyond joy, eager to show his gratitude, took young Tommy by the shoulder, saying, "Thou art free of Tregarrow now: take un to one of the men's rooms, and put un to bed. I'll care for un for life."

"I'm afeard, maister," suggested Tommy the elder, "that he ben't much good for work."

"Never mind, work or no work, he hath earned a right to bed and board, drink and raiment, from me and mine for ever, for what he hath done this night."

So the wassailers led off the neophyte in triumph to his new quarters, not only exulting in the distinguished part played by one of their tribe, but rejoicing in the thought that their own public services had given them a right of toll and levin on the beeves and beer-barrels of Tregarrow.

"Tom," whispered old Guy, gently, "that ere Joep set fire to the thatch to do the robbery, for he seed me put away the cup: 'tis arson and burglary—transportation, if not wus. Can't ye call off the dowg? he's sure to run the country now."

"Well, 'tis not right, father, and he don't deserve it."

"No, no more he don't, but on a night like this we should show mercy."

Tom's response was the putting his fingers into his mouth, and giving a sharp whistle. At first this produced no effect. It was repeated more shrilly and sharply, and soon Dingo was seen coming slowly round the house, stopping now and then as if to show that he had retreated in despite of his better judgment.

"So you will not take shelter with me for the night," said the vicar, approaching the group.

"No, I must sleep under my own roof tree, damaged as it is, in such a time as this."

"Well, then, my dear old friend, I must leave you to think over and enjoy all the blessings and mercies which God has poured upon you to-day."

"Yes, indeed, blessings and mercies indeed. I wish, passon, that I could see you in my case. Would you too say forgiveness?"

"Forgiveness! my old friend. 'Twould be easy indeed for the tongue to repeat what the heart has said so often."

As he spoke, the dark female figure once more appeared, crept towards the vicar, and falling at his feet, clung to his knees, sobbing out, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee. Father, forgive me!"

For an instant Arthur Versturme thought himself again under an illusion; in another instant he had

raised his daughter in his arms, and pressed her to his breast, kissing her fervently on lip and forehead. Not a word was said—men speak not at such times—but the poor penitent amid her own sobs felt the father's tears falling on her cheek. The dame and Lily moved forward to greet the poor wanderer, but the vicar silently waved them back with his hand, and half leading, half bearing his daughter, moved slowly homewards, the groups, as he passed, uncovering their heads in silent respect for the sacredness of the scene.

"Tom," said the yeoman, after a long pause, "sure this hath been a wonderful night—a night, or rather morn, as the passon says, of blessings and mercies."

As he spoke, the voices of the waits in the village sounding clearly through the air struck up their Christmas carol. The joyous strain met with a ready response from the group at the chestnut, and with one impulse, one accord, all joined in the beautiful words—

"Hark ! the herald-angels sing,
'Glory to the new born King,
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled !'"

CHAPTER X.

Conclusions are out of fashion nowadays—have become quite obsolete and unworthy of fast or sensation fiction. The *dramatis personæ* of a story are dismissed generally very abruptly, and with a sort of shadowy fate, a speculative future hanging over them; mysteries which have been growing deeper and darker are left unrevealed, or cleared up hurriedly; broken threads, which it would seem to require a whole volume to reunite, are hastily brought together in one chapter. There is either this conclusion, or none at all; the actors, after a long series of events, being left much as they were. We must confess to a great liking for the more old-fashioned style, when conclusions were conclusions indeed—when all difficulties were cleared up, all doubts explained, all the personages accounted for, and all the events wound up like the end of a history. Even though our characters are so few, and have been so short a time on the stage, and though all the consequences of that wassail night might be readily left to the imagination of the reader, we are loth to drop the curtain without exhibiting them grouped in tableaux which shall illustrate the *dénouement* of our little drama.

We have two groups—two households—that at the vicarage, and at the farm. We will view the former first, though many hold it better to go to the

house of feasting than the house of mourning. Yet we cannot call the vicarage now a house of mourning: throughout the realm of England there is not perhaps on that Christmas day, a home blessed with a holier joy, a deeper hush of peace. And what joy is there higher or brighter than that which comes as the reaction of suffering—the joy which cometh in the morning—the light after darkness? Such a joy abided now on the home and household of St Maddoc.

How changed was that little room! it seemed as if sunshine had been let in on it, and had swept away the gloom and the dinginess! It was cheerful and bright now. How changed, too, was Arthur Versturme! We are often told of the effect wrought by sudden fright, or deep grief, in one night—the hair becoming blanched, and the cheek colourless. Do we not often also see the effect of joy? Do we not see how the soul in a few hours may make face and feature beautiful and radiant with its joy? We may see it now in Arthur Versturme. The shade of sorrow had passed from his brow; a sunny calm rested on it, filling in all the wrinkles and furrows of the old griefs and trials. His eyes, too, were lit with the fine open look of the old time. Tom had been there that morning with all the explanations and revelations. Harrowing many of them were; but how full of heartfelt blessing and consolation. Lily, too, had been there, with her woman's heart,

to welcome and comfort the poor returned wanderer. Arthur Versturme felt, as he pondered on these things, how great a burden had been taken from him, how great a joy had been given. Not only could he say, This my daughter was lost and is found, was dead and is alive again; but he felt that the great shame which had lain upon his heart, and bowed down his spirit, had passed away. He saw his child now erring, but innocent; wilful, but strong even in suffering. Emily sat now at her father's feet, with her head on his knees, her eyes half shut, in that quiet state of happiness when every breath is a prayer, every thought a thanksgiving. How often did her mind start from home, and go over the history of those few last years—the wilfulness and the disobedience, the suffering and the wrong, the poverty and sickness, and all the terrible hours of outraged love and trust, and then come back to rest in peace on that hearth! Her child, her boy was playing on it, frolicking and prattling in his own little way. She had left him at her nurse's the night before, and then, when all was cleared up, all explained, had brought him back, and placed him proudly in her own home. The boy, under the influence of the sea voyage and better treatment, had sprung up in health and strength, and had now all the brightness of childhood. The vicar saw, with a joy which he could scarcely utter, that there was no trace of like-

ness to the father, much to the mother, and more still to the picture of that sainted face, which seemed now to look down sweetly on them all. Dingo had resumed his allegiance to his old mistress, and was lying on the rug, watching the child, or patrolling round the room, or making a more extended reconnaissance into the passages, to be assured, perhaps, that no Jopes were lurking about.

Thus passed those Christmas hours, the father and daughter talking with the tongue, or with the heart; the child gambolling in his simple mirth; and as wassail cup and wassail song were passing merrily round at other firesides, there were hearts by that hearth at St Maddoc's which beat just as joyously with the silent utterances of peace and love.

CHAPTER XI.

Tregarrow without wore rather a battered aspect on that Christmas morn, somewhat like a ship after an action; tarpaulins were thrown over the great gap in the roof, yet could not hide the blackened rafters, and all the marks and stains of fire on walls and windows. It had certainly lost somewhat of its substantial bravery, and the solidity in which it prided itself. It looked as if it had had a blow which had humbled it, without hurting it much.

Within, all was warm, cheery, and cozy as ever. There were no signs of the event of the night. The yeoman and the dame were sitting in their old places. Tom and Lily were walking up and down arm-in-arm, stopping now and then to talk with the old people. "A purty pordigal he is," old Guy would say, with a chuckle, as he looked admiringly on his son's strong, lithe figure, and healthy sunburnt face, "a purty pordigal; look what shoulders he hath, and what a step." "He is rather thin, I think," suggested the dame, who had not half approved of Tom's muscular training, and was thinking how improved he would be when the good living of Tregarrow had put more flesh on his great strong frame. "That's wi' feeding on the husks, you know," chuckled out the yeoman; "a purty pordigal! what an arm he hath; I wonder he ain't afeard to put un round Lily's little waist."

Tom would stop and laugh at this, and show how his arm was larger than the waist, and yet it lay there, strong as it was, lightly as a shadow on a brooklet; and then would contrast his great rough sunburnt hands with hers, and do a hundred other little, silly, pleasant things.

Tom's story had been told more than once that morning, and all poor Emily's adventures discussed and wondered over, and the yeoman had expressed all his surprise—all his indignation and all his wrath—and had then subsided quietly into the

conviction that "the passon would be more like hisself again, poor dear." Lily's cup, which had caused so much stir, had been also produced, and now lay on a chair. The dame, too, had brought out as a sort of corollary the clothes which Lily wore when she arrived at Tregarrow.

"So you really think," said old Guy, "that 'twas Rich Jope who sot fire to the thatch?"

"No doubt of it; but he's clear off now, and we sha'n't see him in this country for some time."

"'Twas best so, Tom; better than 'sizes, and transportation or hanging; but I'll tell you one thing, I shall realise that 'ere bauble of a cup, and put the cash into the bank, for I ben't agoing to have my house burnt over my head for the sake of a young garl's jewelry."

"I s'pose, Guy, they'll be leaving us soon," said the dame, as the pair moved away.

"In coos, dame, 'tis quite nat'ral they should, though I don't see why they shouldn't stop where they be."

"No, Guy, every woman should be missus of her house."

"Well, well, it must have come, and they won't be far. Tom tells me he hath made money enough out there in 'Stralia to buy Penleaze, that 'ull make Tregarrow in a ring fence; and I s'pose that 'ere fal dal when sowld will build 'em a house upon the estate, and they can call it Legacy Lodge or

Legacy Villa," and the old man chuckled lustily at his own conceit.

Preparations were being made for a banquet on a large scale. The dame under the circumstances had repudiated the idea of feasting; but the yeoman had, it seems, often pictured the return of the prodigal, and the principal part of the programme for the celebration of the event was the fatted calf. He would not be denied, so the fatted calf was killed. With his lavish heart he had the night before asked the Dibbles, with their families, to the feast, and old Kit the patriarch had requested, as a great favour, that they might be allowed to sit at a table by themselves, as they would like for once to see all the tribes of the royal family assembled together. This was granted. The guests of the other table were only the relations, the curate, and the domestics. Tom laughed a good deal at the idea of this "feast of the ugly mugs." Young Pretty Tommy had already been placed on the establishment. As an initiation he had been washed after a very severe struggle; and as a further aggravation had been put into a clean shirt and a suit of clothes belonging to Tom when a boy, which gave him an air of respectability very repugnant to his vagabond nature. He had now been installed as squire of the dripping-pan, a very congenial office, and one hitherto unknown in the category of Dibble labour. To dally with

a ladle, and contemplate meanwhile the joints and the fowls as they turned on the spit, browning, dripping, sputtering, and crackling, must have seemed to the Dibbles the very perfection of work made easy. Tommy pursued his avocation evidently with great gusto and apparent impartiality; but we have all our weak sides and leanings, and a close observer might see that there was one goose—a very fat one—which had more than its due share of attention.

Jim had assumed the office of lord-chamberlain, or high-steward, and was busy superintending the arrangements. An altered man was Jim. There was a cock of his beaver, and an elation of manner, which were not justified by the return of Maister Tom alone. The fact was, that he had resumed his position in society, and had once more a vocation. The yeoman had hinted, and Tom had confirmed the hint, that there were to be hounds at Tregarrow, and he was to be huntsman; and this, though they were only to be harriers, had raised him a foot in the scale of humanity.

"Here are father's company," cried out Tom, who was looking out of the window; "and what a tag-rag party!"

There they came by tribes, trooping over the court, a regular migration, looking, too, as though they had mustered in the highways and byways.

"Here we be all, maister, a nice fancy lot," said

old Kit, ushering in the different groups. "I'm afraid we shall eat you out of house and hold." The yeoman did at first feel some doubts on this subject, but a look at the dame's face showed her assurance in the resources of Tregarrow to resist even such a flight of locusts as this.

We have seen the Dibble men before ; we are now introduced to the Dibble matrons, and all the generations of Dibbles. There were budding Dibbles, Dibbles in the hand, Dibbles in the arm, and Dibbles at the breast, all illustrating the family characteristics. There was one other characteristic which their appearance established, and that was fecundity—it was very evident that no Dibble need be ashamed to meet his enemy in the gate. Could a Gorgon's head have been suddenly presented amid that group and turned them all to stone, what treasures of Gothic art would they have become ! Youth is generally supposed to possess a certain beauty in itself. Young pigs are said to be interesting, young donkeys picturesque. The Dibble babyhood despised such pretensions. The Dibbles at the breast might have been translated at once as cherubs to the outer walls of cathedrals, with infinite credit to themselves and the architectural style. The matrons would have made very meritorious medieval stonework saints or female demons, according to the exigency of the case ; and as for the men, they would have formed a collection of

gurgoyles, finials, satyrs, and heads for fountains, which would have driven a fervent medievalist to distraction. As it was, seen all alive, they were "precious bits" of ugliness, which would have delighted the heart of a humorist, and perhaps would have been more telling from the pencil of a Leech than the chisel of a Pugin.

The young generation had shown their predatory habits by spreading themselves over the house, and returning generally with a hunch of cake or bread-and-cheese. One of them in his explorations had discovered young Tommy, and immediately rushed back announcing, "Mother, Tommy hath been washed." At this all the younger scions of the houses started away to witness the phenomenon, evidently regarding him in the same light as eels might do a brother who had been skinned.

The banquet was now spread: it was a repetition of the supper, except for the introduction of geese and turkeys, and that all the viands were steaming hot.

"Now, then, Kit, you settle your company and I'll settle mine, and then we'll fall to." And the manner in which the tribes of Dibble were settled and placed at the table, under the leadership of their heads, did great credit to their organisation. Old Kit acted as master of the ceremonies with great tact; and old Beelzebub, in virtue of his having attended tithe dinners, and Pretty Tommy,

from having served for a year as mace-bearer to the mayoralty, had been elected as chief carvers. It was a great occasion for the Dibbles. All the great family qualities were in the ascendant. The fish-chowder Joyce's tongue dropped oil; old Beelzebub's seemed hung to no other phrase than one of blessing and endearment. Kit threw abroad his jokes as he dispensed the slices of turkey, and there was not a jar anywhere except when some youthful Dibble cried to have more, and another at having had too much. Kit had shown himself a political tactician in producing this gathering—feuds and misunderstandings of long date were made up now—matrons who had never met except to show their contempt, and had even pulled caps, now smiled graciously on each other. It was a good opportunity, too, for the display of offspring and of dresses, though it must be confessed that the Dibble wardrobes were more brilliant than costly, consisting generally of bright yellow and green cottons.

So the feast went on right merrily.

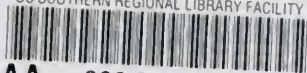
At the other table the mirth was more subdued, though there were glad hearts there too. The old yeoman kept looking at the son, chuckling out "a purty pordigal;" the dame, too, feasted on him, and Lily might also be excused for considering Tom the best part of the banquet. The nieces kept up the running in fun and cheerfulness, though the eldest, a very finely developed woman, evi-

dently thought that the doctrine of fitness had scarcely been carried out in the pairing of Tom and Lily, and the curate did not seem to consider the return of the prodigal on such terms as at all an improvement to the society. The mildest of the nieces, however, did her best to console him. The minor guests showed all the effects of good Christmas cheer. When the dinner was ended, Kit seemed to be looking to the yeoman for a toast. "Not yet, Kit," said he, "we will first ask the passon to return thanks for Tom's return and all other mercies received." And the curate did this well and affectingly.

Here there was a pause, and then the yeoman, after sitting for a while as if in silent thanksgiving, flourishing his tankard, rose and shouted out lustily, "Now, friends and neighbours, one and all, a jolly wassail!"

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